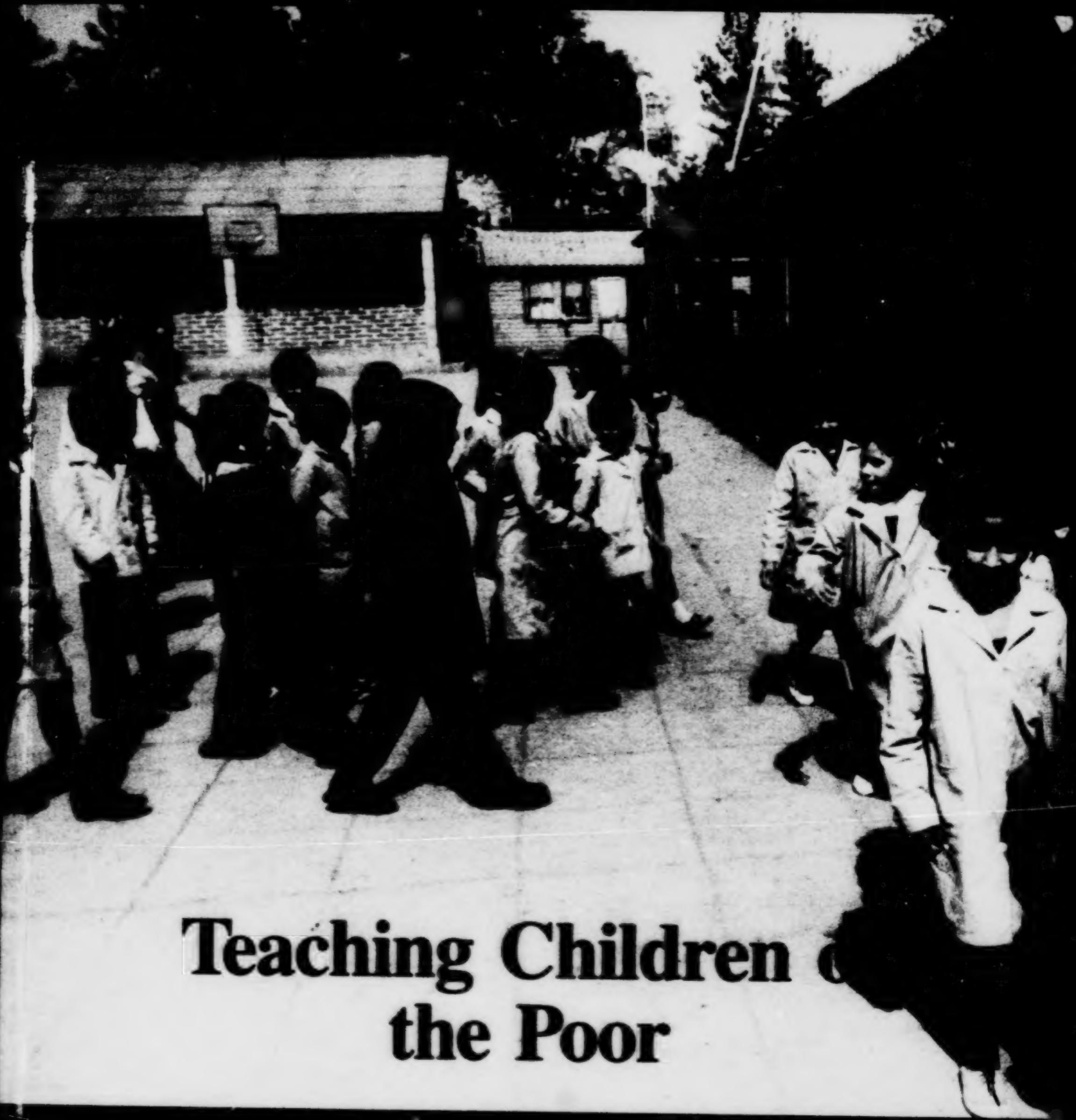

Teaching Children o
the Poor

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Teaching Children of the Poor

An Ethnographic Study in Latin America

Editor:
Beatrice Avalos

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Abstract/Résumé/Resumen

This is a book about teachers, teaching, and learners in poor environments of four Latin American countries: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela. Using an ethnographic approach, the study upon which this book is based involved the observation of rural and urban schools at different periods during a school year. These observations, together with a series of interviews, provided knowledge about processes related to failure experiences of children during their first years in school. What emerged from the study and is presented in this book is a vivid picture of styles of teaching, of characteristics of teacher–pupil interactions, and of the effects, both positive and negative, of teacher beliefs and attitudes (their "practical ideologies") upon pupils' self-concept and attainment. For each country, a selection is made from materials gathered by the researchers that attempts to highlight different aspects of the processes observed: the mode of classroom teaching in Colombia, the differences between types of schools in Venezuela, the way in which failure can be constructed for 1st-year pupils in Chile, and how a teacher considered "different" is successful in the education of Bolivian children. This book should prove useful, especially in deprived areas of the world, for teachers, student teachers, administrators, and parents as a source of reflection about their practices and about what can be done to improve them for the benefit of the pupils.

Ce livre traite des enseignants, de l'enseignement et des enseignés dans les milieux pauvres de quatre pays latinoaméricains : Bolivie, Chili, Colombie et Venezuela. Utilisant l'approche ethnographique, l'étude, dont le livre s'inspire, se fonde sur l'observation d'écoles rurales et urbaines à différents moments de l'année scolaire. L'observation et une série d'entrevues éclairent le processus de l'échec scolaire des enfants pendant leurs premières années d'école. L'étude brosse un tableau très net des styles d'enseignement, des caractéristiques des relations enseignants–élèves et des effets positifs et négatifs des croyances et des attitudes (de « l'idéologie pratique ») des enseignants sur l'idée que les élèves se font d'eux-mêmes et leur succès scolaire. Pour chaque pays, un échantillon du matériel recueilli par les chercheurs illustre les différents aspects du processus observé : le mode d'enseignement en classe en Colombie, les différences entre un type d'école et l'autre au Venezuela, une façon de provoquer l'échec chez les élèves de première année au Chili et comment un enseignant jugé « différent » réussit à éduquer les enfants boliviens. Surtout dans les régions défavorisées du monde, ce livre sera utile aux enseignants, aux élèves-enseignants, aux administrateurs et aux parents car il leur permettra de réfléchir sur leurs façons de faire et sur la manière de les améliorer au profit des élèves.

Este es un libro sobre dociencia maestros y alumnos en ambientes pobres de cuatro paises de América Latina: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia y Venezuela. Este libro está basado en un estudio que, empleando un enfoque etnográfico, abarcó la observación de escuelas rurales y urbanas en diferentes períodos de un año académico. Estas observaciones, junto con a una serie de entrevistas, ilustraron los procesos relacionados con el fracaso de niños en los primeros grados. Los resultados del estudio, constituyen un cuadro vívido de estilos de enseñanza, características de la interacción maestro–alumno, y de los efectos, tanto positivos como negativos, de las creencias y actitudes de los maestros (sus "ideologías prácticas") sobre la auto-perceptión y el logro de los alumnos. Para cada país se hace una selección de los materiales reunidos por los investigadores para tratar de destacar diferentes aspectos de los procesos observados: el modo de enseñanza en las aulas en Colombia; las diferencias existentes entre los tipos de escuelas en Venezuela; la forma como pueden legar al fracaso los alumnos de primer grado en Chile; como un maestro considerado "diferente" tiene éxito en la educación de los niños bolivianos. Este libro debe resultar útil, sobre todo en las áreas menos favorecidas del mundo, para maestros, futuros maestros, administradores y padres, como fuente de reflexión sobre sus actividades y sobre las medidas que se pueden tomar para el beneficio de los alumnos.

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A slow childhood out of which
as out of long grass,
grows the durable pistil
the wood of the man.

— Pablo Neruda

No time is too long spent talking to a child to find out his key words, the key that unlocks himself, for in them is the secret of reading, the realization that words can have intense meaning. Words having no emotional significance to him, no instinctive meaning, could be an imposition, doing him more harm than not teaching him at all. They may teach him that words mean nothing and that reading is undesirable.

— Sylvia Ashton-Warner *(teacher)*

Foreword

In much of the developing world, educational research is largely empirical and quantitative, characterized by the development of standardized tests and questionnaires, the production of data from large samples of schools and individuals, and the analysis of these data by a variety of statistical methods. There are good reasons for such an approach to research. Policymakers wish to know how well their system of education is performing vis-à-vis that of an earlier period of time or those of other nations, or whether a particular reform or innovation is succeeding. Ministry or university researchers assigned the task of gathering this information, usually with a short deadline, are acquainted and comfortable with empirical, quantitative research from their own (often North American) training, and such research is efficient. It lends itself to a division of labour among a number of individuals with various skills and levels of competence. As a result of these factors, the world of educational research, especially in the developing world, continues to be dominated by research traditions and paradigms that emphasize quantitative, empirical, and statistical methods.

While recognizing the need for and importance of such methods, researchers in many parts of the developing world are practicing and developing other approaches more qualitative, ethnographic, and anthropological in nature. Such research is based on quite different traditions, paradigms, and definitions of knowledge and is quite different in its characteristics: small in scale but set within a broad contextual framework, intimate and intensive in method, and richly descriptive in outcome. It is this kind of research, underrepresented in the literature of educational development, that is the subject of this book.

The development of the network that produced the research described in this book was due to many factors. First, there was the problem of school failure — a problem usually blamed on the pupils themselves, their families, and the social and economic conditions in which they find themselves, but perhaps related as well to the behaviour of teachers, the process of teaching, and the climate of the classroom.

Second, there were researchers interested in this problem and in applying qualitative, ethnographic methods of research to its analysis. Beatrice Avalos, a Chilean researcher working at the University of Cardiff in Wales, believed that schools and teachers play a more active role in the process of student failure and that this process could be the subject of ethnographic research across several Latin American countries. These beliefs were seconded by several researchers and research centres in Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, and Chile, who, along with researchers in related areas elsewhere on the continent, eventually formed a network of qualitative research.

Finally, there was a research funding agency, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), that was willing and able to provide funds for this work. These funds were used for a series of training programs in the theoretical framework and practical methods relating to various stages of qualitative research at the University of Texas in Austin and at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional in Mexico City, for the exchange of researchers between project teams, for annual meetings of project leaders, and for the costs of the research projects themselves.

The expanded network has now moved more and more into the development of, and experimentation with, training methods designed to guide teachers into understanding more thoroughly the role they play in creating school failure and the role they might play in preventing it. These methods are based on the descriptions and analyses of schools and classrooms presented in this volume. Future publications, it is hoped, will discuss later results of this work.

Sheldon Shaeffer
Associate Director, Social Sciences Division,
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Acknowledgments

The pursuance and completion of the research project that underlies this book was possible thanks to generous funding received from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). In particular, I wish to thank Kenneth King, former Associate Director of IDRC's Education Program, for initially encouraging the project, and Sheldon Shaeffer, current Associate Director, for his constant support and enlightened input into every phase of the study.

Special thanks are due to the researchers in Austin, Texas, and Mexico City who undertook the training of the research coordinators for the study: Susan Heck, Steve Jackson, Walt Smith, Kay Sutherland, Elsie Rockwell, and Justa Ezpeleta.

Without the team of researchers in each one of the countries, this book and the study behind it would have remained an idea. They are to be thanked for overcoming all sorts of practical difficulties associated with doing ethnographic research in contexts where neither tradition nor sociopolitical conditions offered encouraging support. Many thanks are due also to the teachers, pupils, parents, and community members who allowed their practices to be observed and their privacy to be invaded.

In putting this book together, I am indebted to my colleagues Graham Howells, who offered important stylistic suggestions, and Raymond Lyons, who alerted me to needed changes in style and refinements regarding some points. I must also thank the anonymous readers of the manuscript selected by IDRC, who provided very useful suggestions for its improvement.

Helen James typed at least two partial versions of the manuscript and Shaun Hayward spent many hours preparing the indices. Many thanks to them for their assistance.

Beatrice Avalos

Translation Procedures

The translation of the chapters for this book and the various references to field notes was carried out by Dr Beatrice Avalos, who is Chilean and speaks both Spanish and English. Her life and work in Chile until 1974 and her later work in Great Britain enabled her to understand both cultures.

A first, rough translation was done of the chapters written in Spanish, where the main effort was to record as faithfully as possible the usages and colloquialisms found in the field-note material. Having done this, a British colleague who also spoke Spanish, Graham Howells, read the English version and decided whether it would make sense to an English-speaking audience. A number of stylistic changes were then made and the English equivalent was found for some colloquialisms. A revised version was then sent to those authors who also had a knowledge of English: Araceli de Tezanos and Gabriela Lopez. Finally, once the whole book had been assembled, including the chapters written by Beatrice Avalos, the help of another British colleague, Raymond Lyons, was engaged. He also had a knowledge of Spanish. Some further refinements were then made and useful suggestions for the introductory and interpretative chapters were incorporated to the text.

On the whole, a special effort was made to retain the intent of Spanish expressions, even at the expense of the correctness of English style, when it was deemed important for interpretative purposes.

Introduction

1

This description of teaching and teachers in some schools in Latin America arose from the urgent need to study what occurs in classrooms and schools to improve education. It represents an attempt to find out how some educational policies and practices are working out and what might be done to better meet the needs of the children. This work is an example of an attempt to make existing efforts and resources more relevant and productive at a time when money is scarcer, and ideas and proposals for remedying the basic economic and social difficulties facing Latin American countries are less positive than they were two decades ago.

When we began our teaching careers in the early 1960s in South America, we did so in the midst of what promised to be an exciting time of change. The Alliance for Progress, President Kennedy's initiative for Latin America that proposed to link bilateral aid from the United States to the carrying out of programs of reform affecting the economic, social, and educational systems of the countries concerned, had been established. Political convictions in Latin America seemed, in turn, to be oriented toward some form of social democracy that would pay greater attention to the needs of the masses of poor people by strengthening programs of economic and social development. The concepts of "modernization" and "democratization" were used to define the road ahead, while politicians spoke of revolutionary changes to be carried out "in freedom" and humanists looked to education as a possible liberating force for the poor in addition to its "consciousness-raising" power.[1]

Almost with calculated pragmatism, it was said that to invest in social programs would be useful in terms of overall development and, for that matter, to promote equality of educational opportunities would ensure political and social stability as well as economic progress. In the midst of this climate, one might almost say euphoric, it seemed to us that it was imperative to examine critically the existing educational provisions and to support the introduction of more or less sweeping reforms in the system. The belief in the importance and power of attempts to modernize the educational system marked much of our work throughout the decade. This was supported both by structural functionalist and Marxist theories. Structural functionalism lay behind the popular concepts that educational development was a factor contributing to the achievement of sociocultural and economic development, although attention was given to the constraints by an existing background of deprivation. In contrast, the various forms of Marxism that influenced social and political thinking at the time remained skeptical about the possibility of socioeconomic development pursued within existing capitalist structures and economic dependency upon industrialized economies. Nevertheless, both within the structural functionalist and Marxist perspectives, it was recognized that nothing would change if people, especially those who would most need to do so, could not understand the nature of the changes required or, in other words, were not "conscious" of why deprivation persists. Thus, it was felt that support for political and economic change would require massive programs of adult education seen as "consciousness raising." Especially required would be an increase of opportunities for the children of the poor to acquire the tools of education that could further their later participation in the conduct of public affairs.

---

[1] A particularly powerful influence in this respect was the work and writings of the Brazilian educator Paulo Friere (1972a, b, 1974). After being exiled from Brazil in 1964, he went to Chile where he worked with the adult education programs linked to the land reform of the Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei (1964–1970).

Only in the next decade, with its sequel of failed reforms, as in Peru, and of military coups, as in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, did it seem that something had gone radically wrong. The optimistic, naive faith in the power of social reforms gave way to serious and somewhat pessimistic assessments about the effects of external pressures and the force of reactionary groups within our societies. As a result, we were also led to attribute the failure of education to produce a new cadre of people to the effects of external factors. We did not yet examine whether, and if so to what extent, social reforms such as education had in fact been more than new structures imposed on traditional forms of educational practice that remained largely unaltered. It was easier, in a way, to attribute failure of the system to factors external to the school and to give reason to determinist interpretations, whether of a structural functionalist or Marxist type, about what caused ineffectiveness of schooling. The statistics of failure hit us forcefully when, for example, we realized that in Chile, repetition, one gateway to dropping out, in 1976 was at a rate of 18.3% for the 1st year of primary school. Likewise, alarming drop-out and repetition rates could be found throughout Latin America, offering little variation in the 1970s relative to what had been the case in the 1960s (Tables 1 and 2).

Without denying the validity of theories that underline the economic and social constraints that affect educational achievement, including pressures from the prevailing power groups to maintain selective educational systems, and without denying the evidence available from quantitative surveys about such relationships,[2] it seemed to us that much more information was needed about the internal functioning of the educational system to interpret more accurately the reasons for the persistence of failure. Obviously, in the case of Chile, the effects of the military government's economic policies were noticed in the increase in the number of repeaters between 1974 and 1977. All over Latin America, however, the numbers were alarming, although perhaps exacerbated in the case of Colombia, where, of the children that had begun at 1st year, the system was retaining only 40% to the end of primary school (see Table 4). In this respect, it was suggested by Schiefelbein (1980), one of the more persistent students of rates of repetition and drop outs in Latin

---

[2] See the review on studies of determinants of achievement (also known as the education production function studies) by Schiefelbein and Simmons (1981). This includes relevant studies for Latin America such as those sponsored by the ECIEL (Programa de Estudios Conjuntos de Integración Económica Latinoamericana) network on research centres in economics and by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement).

Table 1. Percentages of repeaters (male and female) in primary education.

	Chile[a]	Colombia	Venezuela[b]
1965	—	19.0	15.5
1966	—	18.6	11.9
1967	13.5	18.7	11.6
1968	11.6	17.7	11.5
1969	11.1	17.1	11.7
1970	10.4	16.6	2.2
1971	7.8	16.1	2.5
1972	8.0	16.0	2.5
1973	11.1	15.4	2.7
1974	12.0	15.4	2.9
1975	12.5	—	2.7
1976	12.3	—	2.5
1977	12.6	—	7.6
1978	—	—	—

[a] Introduced automatic promotion for the first four grades of the primary system in 1965 but discontinued practice in 1974.

[b] Introduced automatic promotion in 1970 for the first four grades of the primary system but discontinued practice in 1977.

Table 2. Estimated survival (male and female) in primary education for cohorts starting around 1965/66, 1970/71, and 1976/77.

Country	Cohort starting in:	Proportion of cohorts reaching grade:							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Chile	1966	1000	853	806	756	705	660	596	521
	1970	1000	901	853	817	762	696	620	547
	1976[a]	1000	918	877	838	786	729	667	587
Colombia	1965	1000	692	519	427	370	—	—	—
	1970	1000	695	551	413	375	—	—	—
	1973	1000	683	559	408	371			
Venezuela	1965	1000	848	791	696	622	567	—	—
	1970	1000	902	851	719	655	616	—	—
	1976[a]	1000	917	869	800	737	676	—	—

Source: Unesco (1980a).

[a] Estimated proportions only.

America, that more than external factors could be at work in the production of school failure.

> Repetition is an indication that the system is not working properly. Many children remain in school for a number of years and pass only one or two grades before they drop out. It could be argued that this failure is due exclusively to external factors since it affects mainly children of the lower classes, but there appears to be sufficient information to suggest that children from all social levels and cultural situations are affected, although to different degrees, and that with appropriate methods, performance can be increased and repetition eliminated.

Turning to an examination of Latin American research on schooling and teacher effects (Avalos and Haddad 1979) in search of possible explanations for school failure, we found that there was little that could be gleaned in terms of understanding the characteristics of the teaching–learning process and its possible contribution to either the success or failure of children from poor backgrounds. Thus, it was the dissatisfaction with determinist versions of school failure in Latin America and with the existing studies that attempted to examine the effect of school processes that impelled us to undertake the study in this book.

The School and Community Project

The origins of this project can be traced back to a meeting organized early in 1980 in the city of Bogotá, Colombia, that was sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. The project brought together, among others, researchers from the four countries that were eventually to participate in the study: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela. The rationale for inviting representatives of these countries was the possibility of a study of school failure that focused on the period in which there is greater risk, the first 4 years of primary school,[3] in contexts that were similar in socioeconomic level but dissimilar in other respects.

In the discussions that followed, it was agreed that a study be carried out attempting to deal with the following questions. What events in classroom life appear to affect pupil learning and their school success or failure? What indications of the characteristics of each educational system (teacher qualifications, in-service training provision, teacher–pupil ratio, modernization attempts, availability of resources and teaching aids, educational policies, system of administration) are expressed in school and classroom life? What are the characteristics of the community to which most children from a given school belong? What is the community's level of development and employment condition? What are the beliefs and values of parents and other community members regarding education and the modernization theories supported by policymakers and teachers? What is the language mostly spoken at home? How do all these characteristics of the community relate to the process of schooling? Who are the teachers and how do they relate to parents and other community members? What does the community expect from their teachers in terms of both the education of their children and teacher participation in community life? What do teachers, in turn, think about the role of parents and others with regard to schooling activities? How do these relations affect what happens at school?

The common thread uniting the group of researchers that gathered at the Bogotá meeting was the fact that, to a greater or lesser extent, we shared a similar view about the causes of underdevelopment and of the unequal distribution of resources in Latin American societies. We were critical of the capitalist system both in its national and international forms of control of underdeveloped economies and felt that it affected the possibilities of cultural and educational development. However, we were also weary of the determinist assumptions behind a number of theoretical and empirical studies about educational opportunities that, in practice, led to the neglect of the schooling process as such. Further, and as expressed earlier, it was our conviction that to date, the predominant research methodology used to study educational problems in Latin America (simple forms of survey and correlational studies) was not capable of dealing with the study of processes. Hence, our almost intuitive commitment at the time to what we described as a qualitative research approach.

---

[3] The pattern of repetition for 23 countries in Latin America shows that it is highest in the 1st year of the cycle and then declines, reaching its lowest level in the final year (6th or 8th) (Unesco 1980a).

In view of the above, we considered the need for a study that, although concentrating on particular situations, would not lose sight of the structural aspects that we felt interact with or have an effect upon processes occurring in social units such as schools and classrooms. Therefore, the appropriate research approach is one resembling that of the anthropologist who attempts to understand a culture by becoming part of it, but, at the same time, requires the ability to step back to interpret its processes in light of the wider social world of which it is part.

Although there seemed to be a dearth of educational studies in Latin America that concerned themselves with what might be called the "internal" factors of school failure, elsewhere there had been a plethora of studies on the subject involving in-depth case studies of school processes using nonquantitative sociological and anthropological procedures. Both in the North American educational and the British sociological research environments, the use of participant observation and unstructured or semistructured interviews with those involved in educational situations, and the analysis of documents such as school records or children's work, had provided a powerful source of information about the conditions under which youngsters from certain social groups (blacks, working class, or other groups) might be classified school failures. Among the noticeable North American studies are those carried out by Rist (1970, 1973). By using a participant observation method, he was able to detect the construction of school failure in primary school children as beginning in their kindergarten year with the early failure expectations of the teachers. These were expressed in various ways: differential seating arrangements, differentials of teaching time, ways of using praise and control, and extent of autonomy in the classroom. By 2nd year, Rist had found that the labels children had received in their kindergarten year had become an acceptable and public way of describing and interpreting their capabilities. A number of other studies before and after those of Rist also highlighted the connection between expectations, labeling, and failure. Particularly, the earlier work of Leacock (1969) in four schools in the United States that were different in terms of the racial and socioeconomic composition of their student bodies originated from a very similar concern to that of the study presented in this book. Leacock's (1971: 172) initial assumption was that classrooms are not monolithic and do not mould all children under the same impression.

> I wished to study the means whereby in this, as in any other social situation, a variety of alternative roles are structured for children. Some of these are relatively obvious. For instance, "fast" and "slow" children, compliant and rebellious children, withdrawn children, and so on, are accepted and expected by a teacher, who assesses a classroom in such terms during the opening days of the school terms.
>
> Some children will already have been discussed with previous teachers, and will have reputations as bright, dull, helpful, or naughty children. Classroom gradients will vary, so that a child identified as "bad" in one group might be closer to the normative expectation in another, a much more rebellious child will play the role of the "really bad" boy or girl.

What Leacock (1971: 176) found by using teacher and child interviews, as well as classroom observations concentrated on pupils and teacher, was that although teachers in affluent middle-class and poor black areas could be equally poor, children in the affluent school would learn "in spite of poor teaching," whereas, in the other school, children would not learn "because of poor teaching." The central finding of her study was that academic expectations of teachers based on the social class origin and race of the children were crucial, but that school life actively reinforced the children's social positions by expecting more learning from the white middle-class child. She argued conclusively against the theory that poor children fail because they are fed with counter-class values. Her material made her "realise how oversimplified is the assumption that a major difficulty for lower-class children in school is identification with its 'middle-class values,' in comparison with middle-class children who readily identify" (Leacock 1971).

In England, a similar concern for the failure of working-class youngsters in the secondary system produced a series of school studies that looked into processes leading to school and counter-school cultures in three types of school organizations: the selective grammar school, the secondary-modern school, with its intake of nongrammar school pupils, and the comprehensive school (Hargreaves 1967; Lacey 1970; Ball 1981). These studies examined the relationship between school structure and group differentiation based on ability and the generation of an antischool culture among low-class youngsters classified as less able. The processes by which an antischool culture develops were found to be complex and to involve school-related factors such as teacher attitudes and behaviours and reactions from other pupils to the "fated" ones, as well as parents' attitudes and relationships both to the school and the individual youngster.

A notable study of a primary school operating within the "progressive" philosophy of education was done in England by Sharpe and Green (1975). Teacher perspectives and early classification processes were examined and the background situation and possibilities of children labeled as normal, ideal, or problematic were considered. The contradiction between the teachers' official philosophy and their operational or practical philosophy was noted, as was the tendency to reify their interpretation of the atypical children. Sharpe and Green (1975: 221) suggested that not only is there "a developing hierarchy of pupils but also the content of education is being selectively organised and socially transmitted." The importance of this finding, as the authors concluded, is that children deemed as either successful or unsuccessful pupils early on will have had their future entry into the occupational structure crucially determined.

The Country Contexts

The four countries in South America (Fig. 1) that provided the setting for this research differ from each other in many respects. However, here we will only focus on some of their population indicators and on some features of their cultural and educational development (Table 3), and we will refer to what appeared to be an important conditioning factor for the implementation of the research we are describing: their "political momentum."

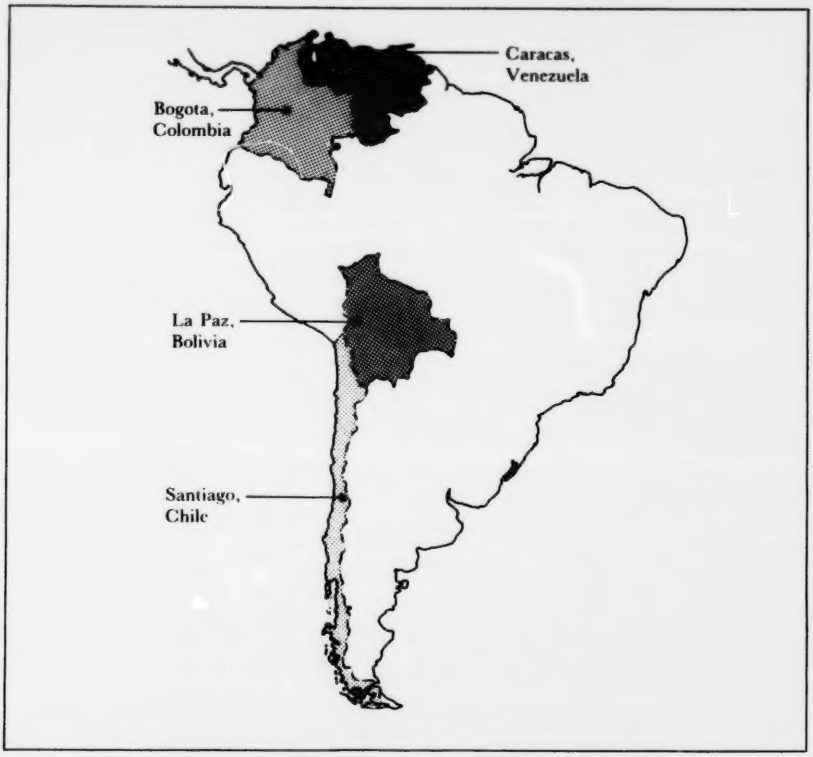

Fig. 1. *The four South American countries studied and their capitals.*

Bolivia and Chile are neighbouring countries, with Bolivia still holding grievances traceable to wars in the 19th century through which Chile deprived Bolivia of an outlet to the sea. The major part of the Bolivian population belongs to the Quechua and Aymara Indian groups, descendants of whom are also found in the northern part of Chile. This explains the characteristics of the music and crafts that are shared by population groups in both countries. Bolivia is a bigger country (1 098 581 km²) than Chile (756 946 km²); however, in 1970, Bolivia's population totaled only 5 million compared with Chile's 11 million people. In Bolivia, the population of Indian extraction is far larger than the Spanish groups and Spanish is effectively spoken by less than half of the people. Chile, on the other hand, is ethnically, linguistically, and culturally much more homogeneous. This is due partly to the practice of the Spaniards at the time of colonization of mixing with the Indian population, but is also a consequence of the extermination in a 3-century war between the Indians and the Spanish invaders. Also, the later waves of immigrants, mainly Germans, Yugoslavians, and Italians, have contributed to asserting in the country a more dominant European outlook than that found in Bolivia. Economically, both countries are largely dependent on the export of their mineral products (tin from Bolivia and copper from Chile), although agricultural production constitutes a major export commodity in Chile.

Table 3. Population indicators for Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Country	GNP per capita income (USD), 1982	Life expectancy at birth (years), 1982	Urbanization,[a] 1982	Illiteracy levels[b] (%)		School enrollment ratios in 6–17 year age-group, 1981		Education expenditure as % of GNP, 1981
				Male	Female	Male	Female	
Bolivia	570	51	45	24.2	48.6	77	64	3.1
Chile	2210	70	82	11.1	12.8	94[c]	96[c]	5.8[c]
Colombia	1460	64	65	13.6	16.1	88	87	2.6
Venezuela	4140	68	84	20.3	26.6	75	73	5.8
United Kingdom	9660	74	91	—	—	90	92	5.7[d]
United States	13160	75	78	—	—	99[d]	99[d]	6.8

Source: Unesco ([illegible], 1981, 1984), World Bank (1984).

[a] Urban population as percentage of total population.

[b] Various years: Bolivia, 1976; Chile, 1970; Colombia, 1981; Venezuela, 1971.

[c] Values are for 1982.

[d] Values are for 1980.

To look at the capital cities of both these countries is to see how different they are in their level of development and the composition of their population. Santiago, Chile, is a modern city with close to 4 million people. An impressive group of skyscrapers competes, in the view of the observer, with the background majesty of the Andes, which frame the eastern part of the city. Here also stand beautifully landscaped gardens around architecturally interesting houses of the rich. Toward the periphery of the southern, northern, and western part of the city, the visitor discovers the contrasting effects of the much bigger stretches of poor housing and of human agglomeration. La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, is a highland city with stunning mountain scenery around it, where one can climb within the urban area from 3000 to 4000 m and experience concomitant variations in temperature, vegetation, and economic and social activities. There are very big differences with Santiago in the way the city appears to the stranger. The La Paz shantytown areas, located in the heights of the city, are even more miserable than those in equivalent areas of Santiago. The lower middle-class sections of La Paz tend more to resemble the poorer sections rather than their equivalent middle-class areas of Santiago. The heterogeneity of La Paz is also evident as one walks around the centre of the city and sees the Spanish and mestizo types in almost the same numbers as Indian men or women, who, wearing their colourful *polleras* (very full skirts), sell small items and traditional crafts or talk to male healers, who practice their profession outside one of the main churches in the city.

The people of Bolivia have one of the lowest average per capita incomes in the region (USD 570), while Chileans have an official per capita income of USD 2210. Official information, however, with its emphasis on averages, obscures the differences between the more affluent groups and the real poor. Thus, for example, toward the end of the period (1982) in which this research was being carried out, there were tremendous price rises in Bolivia that increased the rate of inflation from 25% in 1981 to 300% in 1982, with people having to pay 48% more for bread and 610% more for milk. The largest increase in salary that year, which went to the miners, was only 84% (ECLA 1984).

The Chilean situation in 1982 was also very dramatic. Unemployment rose to an unprecedented height in greater Santiago, where more than one-third of the active population and over one-half of the urban labour force of Chile live. By September 1982, one out of every four workers in greater Santiago was out of work and the officially recorded 22% unemployed was twice as high as that of the preceding year. The problem especially hit the manufacturing and construction sectors, and was made all the more dramatic by the fact that besides the Minimal Employment Programme of the government, there was no other way of securing subsistence for the unemployed and their families (ECLA 1984).

Bolivia and Chile differ rather importantly in their educational level as indicated by literacy rates and the different educational attainment of the male and female population. Thus, although the 1970 census indicated that Chile had 12.8% female illiteracy, in Bolivia, the rate was 58.8% (see Table 3). Likewise, school enrollment in 1975 was higher in Chile than in Bolivia; however, both countries spend a similar proportion of their gross national product (GNP) on education.

In 1965 and 1968, respectively, Chile and Bolivia carried out sweeping modernizing reforms of their education systems. In both cases, the main purpose of the reforms was to expand school enrollment and increase provisions so that children might at least finish their primary education. Both systems introduced an 8-year primary or basic school and altered the contents of their curriculum accordingly. In spite of disparities in the extent of the achievement of the aims of coverage and equal educational opportunities, both countries have not been able to overcome wastage by repetition and drop outs. Thus, one finds, for example, that in Chile, for a cohort starting in first grade, the chance of survival is between 80 and 90% by the end of the school year (see Table 2) and that the repetition rate for the first grade, using estimates of Schiefelbein and Grossi (1981),[4] is 23.9%. More recent government figures (1979) indicate lower overall rates of repetition, although the highest percentage remains in 1st year (14.3%). Unfortunately, there are no official drop-out or repetition rates quoted for Bolivia other than the estimates of repetition by Schiefelbein and Grossi (1981), which indicate 24.4% 1st-year repetition in 1975.

The other two countries in the study, Colombia and Venezuela, differ in various ways from their southern neighbours. Their populations are much less homogeneous than that of Chile, but more so with respect to culture and language than the population of Bolivia. Colombia, especially, is considered to be the most Spanish of the South American republics, even though the population of European extraction is not much higher than 20% as reported in the 1970 census. Mestizos constitute 50% of the population, while mulatos, blacks, and Indians share the remaining 30%. Colombia is located in the northwestern corner of South America and its coasts border the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. It is a rich country from an agricultural and mineral point of view, but its economy is overly dependent on the production of coffee. Migration from rural areas to the cities, especially to Bogotá, the capital city with 3 million people, is a cause of severe social problems. This is particularly noticeable in the *gamines* (vagrant children), who wander around the streets of the city, stealing to survive and sleeping wherever they find a suitable place. Colombia's per capita income is USD 1460, which comfortably places the country within the group that the World Bank calls the middle-income economy countries (above USD 410). As in the case of the other Latin American countries, however, Colombia is haunted by the problem

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[4] Schiefelbein and Grossi (1981) explain that the data available on enrollment and repeaters by year underestimate the actual level of repetition. Data on repetition are usually based on information obtained by the teachers from the students of each new class. Pupils who are weak are often transferred by their parents to other schools to repeat the year. The data sent to the ministries are what the class teacher records after a show of hands, generally on one occasion only. Thus, "all complex statistical definitions prepared by the statistical units in the Ministry of Education finally depend on the concept which each student has of what a repeater is." Schiefelbein and Grossi (1981) thus propose the use of three alternative procedures for calculating repetition based on different sets of data that are available in many Latin American countries. The first model uses the age distributions of the enrollment in each year grade; and relates it to enrollments in grade g in year t, promotion to grade $g \pm 1$ in year $t \pm 1$, and number of repeaters in grade g in year t; new entrants in grade g in year t; and time, both the calendar year and the age cohort. The second model operates on the basis of relating first-grade enrollment to new entrants. The third model relates first-grade enrollment to the transition flows to the next period: repeaters plus promotees and drop outs equal first-grade enrollment. Therefore, repeaters may be computed as the balance between enrollment and the total number of promotees and drop outs. This is the model that gives the highest repetition rates.

Table 4. Rate of retention for Colombian primary and secondary education (1980).

	Primary	Secondary
Urban	60.1	53.6
Rural	16.7	26.0
Total	40.1	53.6

Source: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Oficina Sectorial de Planeación Educativa, División de Estadísticas y Sistemas, Bogotá, Colombia.

of rising unemployment and economic difficulties. In fact, in 1982, its GND rose by only 1%. Illiteracy rates are alarmingly high in Colombia (15% in 1981), but of even more concern are its rates of school wastage. In 1980, the national total for children retained in the primary school system was 40% (Table 4), with the lowest rate being found among the rural primary children (16.7%). In turn, the 1st-year rate of repetition in 1980, as published by the Ministry of Education, was 16.9%; however, with a different mode of calculation, Schiefelbein and Grossi (1981) showed this rate to be around 40%. School enrollment rates in Colombia for the 6–23 year olds were not much different from those in Bolivia (see Table 3).

At the time of the initiation of the study, Venezuela was still profiting from the effects of the world oil boom. It was thus considered to be one of the countries with the highest per capita income in the region (USD 4140). Its population (16.7 million) has one of the highest growth rates in the world. However, it is an irregularly distributed population as people move increasingly into the cities, a fact that is noticeable in the number of tower blocks and the poverty shack belt on the hills of Caracas, the capital city. Venezuela continues to be plagued by problems of high illiteracy (27.8%), low school enrollment ratios, and growing unemployment since 1979 (8.2% in 1982). Official rates of repetition for 1976 show that for the 1st year of primary school, there was a mean repetition rate of 10.7% (Unesco 1980a). This, of course, is one of the lowest values of the region but is explained by the introduction of automatic promotion between 1974 and 1977. Even within this system of promotion, however, repetition may occur if parents voluntarily decide to have their children repeat.

The training of teachers differs somewhat in all countries. On the whole, primary school teachers are trained in Normal Schools, whereas secondary teachers are trained in universities. Normal Schools are training institutions that may or may not be of university level but provide 2 or 3 years of education beyond the secondary level. In countries where there are two cycles for basic education, such as in Bolivia, Chile, and Venezuela, the content of teacher training is not subject diversified for the first cycle but is for the second cycle. No longer does there appear to be a differential form of training for rural and urban teachers. It is not uncommon for primary teachers in the countries concerned to strive to improve their chances of promotion by taking courses in the university or even by attempting to move on to a different career while continuing to teach. This is a way of trying to overcome the problems associated with the low wages and low social status that the primary teacher has in almost all the countries of the Latin American region. By far, females tend to dominate primary school teaching, especially in Chile, where they constitute 74% of the teaching force. Work loads in the countries concerned do not, on average, appear to be very high. Bolivia, Chile, and Venezuela have teacher–pupil ratios of 20, 34, and 33, respectively. These ratios, although not even close to that of the United States (19) are substantially lower than the ratios in Chad (77) and the Republic of Korea (48) (Unesco 1981).

Turning to the historical and political conditions of the countries at the time of the study, there appeared to be noticeable differences between them. Although Colombia and Venezuela could be considered relative democracies, where elections were normally held, Chile had been under a severely repressive 8-year dictatorship and, at the time of the study, Bolivia had just experienced its most repressive military coup to date (by General Garcia Meza in September 1981).

The Venezuelan study was undertaken by the Ministry of Education. In Colombia, it was, in fact, one of the Ministry of Education officials who personally sought the country's participation in the study and proposed a suitable institution as sponsor. This turned out to be the educational research centre located at the National Pedagogical University (CIUP). However, in Chile or Bolivia, it would have been very difficult to engage the respective ministries of education in the project. Thus, the Chilean sponsor became a private educational research centre, which, having formed part of the Catholic University of Chile, had been forced out together with other social science centres in the years after the 1973 military coup. At the time of the research, it was institutionally supported by the Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, a body set up by the Catholic Church in Chile to preserve the independence of social science research. The Bolivian centre was also a private institution that was often harassed during the military dictatorship on account of the focus of its activities, which were aimed at education among the poorer sectors of the country. The fact that the coup took place in Bolivia at the time the study was entering its fieldwork phase caused work with the rural schools to be too conspicuous for the safety of the researchers and, therefore, these schools had to be dropped from the study. On the other hand, a major change in the administration of the Chilean school system, instituted in 1981, caused much worry among teachers and head teachers. Specifically, the shift from centralized to local municipal control, which was involved, produced cases of undue dismissal of teachers, which, of course, left the others fearing for their jobs. Also noted in this change of system was an increase in the bureaucratic requirements and forms of inspectorate that seemed to threaten the teachers' independence.[5] In addition to all this, there was a decrease in real wages for primary teachers that brought them down almost to the level of an unskilled worker.

Thus far, this discussion has dealt with the background of the research in this book. The next chapters will introduce the study as it was carried out in the different settings by focusing on selected aspects from each country report. We begin with a chapter on the procedures used by the different research teams to implement the research and to train the researchers. We then describe, in Chapter 3, the settings where the study was carried out. Chapters 4 to 7 deal with certain aspects drawn from the studies carried out in the different countries. They do not constitute full summaries of each country's report; rather, they are selected considerations of areas that, seen together, are relevant to the discussion of teaching, learning, and success or failure. Thus, in Chapter 4, Araceli de Tezanos analyses the style of teaching in Colombian classrooms. The characteristics of school type and mode of teaching in structurally different Venezualan schools is discussed by Irma Hernadez in Chapter 5. The case of a single teacher considered to be different from most others found in the Bolivian study is presented by Maritza de Crespo in Chapter 6. Finally, the study that most closely followed developments throughout a single school year is considered by Gabriela Lopez and her co-workers in their discussion of the processes of construction of failure in Chilean schools (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 then seeks to summarize the findings from all the country studies about the characteristics of schools and teachers and attempts an interpretative analysis of the characteristics of teaching that appear related to school failure. We end with a conclusion (Chapter 9) that is perhaps more of a statement about the potential of a study that, as is often the case in Third World as well as other countries, had to be carried out under trying sociopolitical as well as professional conditions.

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[5] This was largely because the Ministry of Education retained a supervisory role: i.e., vigilance over the quality of instruction. The municipalities, on the other hand, were concerned with all matters relating to the smooth running of the school and, hence, also carried out supervisory activities. In practice, then, teachers found themselves subjected to frequent and very often similar types of supervision by representatives from the ministry and the municipalities.

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Research Procedures

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After the decision was made to go ahead with a study on the processes leading to school failure or success, it became clear that there would be a need to structure a training experience in qualitative and, more specifically, ethnographic research. The researchers came from quite different backgrounds and experiences. Some were well versed in European and North American research and social science theory. Some were more comfortable with developing action programs than with designing research. Few, however, had systematic experience with the range of skills required to implement a long-term qualitative research project. Thus, at the initial planning meeting held in Bogotá, it was agreed that training would be provided, in Spanish, before the project began. Researchers at the University of Texas in Austin and at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional in Mexico City were contracted to design and carry out 6 weeks of training activities in the theoretical frameworks and practical methods relating to various stages of qualitative research. The program in Austin centred on much of the anthropological theory and research literature found in the United States that relates to schooling, and practical experiences were provided through the Hispanic community schools in Texas. The training in Mexico, besides providing further insight into anthropological literature, also centred on the theoretical underpinnings of ethnography and its links with other social science theory. Among the materials used were research reports on school-based ethnographies carried out in Mexico. The four country coordinators, Araceli de Tezanos, Maritza de Crespo, Gabriela Lopez, and Irma Hernandez, all participated in these workshops. Having completed their training, they went back to their countries and proceeded to select co-workers, to train them in the same way that they had been trained, and to work out with them the design for the study in their country.

Characteristics of the Fieldwork

Ethnography as a theoretical approach and as a method of research has been discussed extensively. It is closely linked to anthropology, but its use is not coextensive with this discipline, as it also has close links to sociological inquiry. As far as this study is concerned, ethnography was chosen as a research approach because of its closeness to the phenomenological conception of how knowledge is constructed and how knowledge about social reality is achieved.[1] Its emphasis on the description and understanding of processes and of the meaning structures of those involved in social events seemed to provide the only sensible means of approaching the complexities of school life and identifying, if possible, the conditions under which pupil success and failure take place.[2] The practice of ethnography as applied to schooling ranges from the observation, description, and interpretation of singular microevents, such as linguistic interaction in the classroom, to what Ogbu (1980) calls macroethnography. Macroethnography seeks to explore the relationships between the single social event and other social factors and institutions. Although disagreeing with reproductionist theory (such as expounded by Pierre Bourdieu or Louis Althusser),[3] the assumptions of this study considered the conditioning effects of contextual factors of a socioeconomic, cultural, and political type upon educational processes. It was thus felt that the approach chosen would move closer along the continuum toward macroethnography and that there could be an effort to approximate what Ogbu (1980) called a "multilevel" approach to ethnography for which the school ethnographer

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[1] See, for example, the work of Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schutz, and the later phenomenological work of Berger and Luckmann. See also the critical hermeneutical strands of phenomenology present in the theories of Habermas (1971) and Adorno (1975).

> needs an "ethnographic imagination," a good working theory of the social structure of the school and of the wider community in which the school is located.
>
> His study should be "holistic" i.e. it should show how education is linked with the economy, the political system, local social structure and belief system of the people served by the schools.

Because the influence of contextual factors would be taken into account by selecting a multisite approach (Herrot and Firestone 1983), it was decided that the selected schools in the different South American countries would be located in both urban and rural areas. The impact of other socioeconomic factors would be kept somewhat constant by concentrating on a low socioeconomic school population that could, of course, be subject to different life experiences depending on the country concerned. Although it was considered desirable, as Ogbu (1980) suggests, to attend to other historical and community-related influences, in practice, this was not always possible, although all the researchers indicated an awareness and varying degrees of attention to their relevance.

In general, the research procedures that were used involved participant observation, semistructured interviews, and documentary analysis. The research process moved from "foreshadowed problems"[4] that guided an open initial process of observation to later, more focused observations and interviews. As the study progressed, the descriptions and interpretative analyses moved concomitantly from more tentative and hypothetical positions to more clearly formulated understandings of the processes involved. These were partly based on the detection of key behaviours or events[5] that were seen over a period to confer meaning to the situations observed. All the categories that were used to express such situations were formulated from the data and, although later linked to existing theories, were not conceptualized from these theories but from the events themselves, as witnessed by the researcher.

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[2] A number of studies refer to the theory and practice of ethnography. For an account of both aspects, as well as for a good annotated bibliography, see Hammersely and Atkinson (1983) and Goetz and LeCompte (1984).

[3] For a discussion on reproductionist theory, see Giroux (1983). The thrust of reproductionist theorists is that schools are instruments of the dominant powers in society that are part of the capitalist economic structure. Their contention is that schools utilize their resources to reproduce the social relations and social attitudes that sustain the existing class divisions and economic organization of society. Among those who hold to reproductionist theory wholly or in part are Althusser (1971), Bowled and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Bernstein (1977).

[4] As counseled by Malinowski (1972:8–9): "Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies."

To a large extent, the data presented to substantiate discussions in the country reports and in the chapters of this book were transcripts taken from classroom teacher–pupil interactions or from interviews with various actors in the educational process (teachers, pupils, or parents). These transcripts were selected because initially they provided material useful in the detection of key events, giving direction to the analysis, or because they supported, as illustrations, the interpretative categories that emerged from the various readings. On the whole, the commonsense interpretations of the material were accepted and no special effort was exerted to analyze the conversations reported with the specific interest that a sociolinguist such as Stubbs (1977) might have to explore: "the problematic relationships between what is said and what is meant." However, in an indirect way, the analysis of the ethnographic data did lead, almost inadvertently, to concerns about the actors' "definitions of the situation." In this case, this was the element leading teachers to define and interpret the situation of problem children and to decide on subsequent actions.

Although all countries had agreed to a common framework of general questions (presented in Chapter 1) and to observing the first 4 years of school in both urban and rural low socioeconomic settings, the specific model of implementation differed from country to country. This was largely due to the need to adapt to local conditions, both practical and political. In the following sections, the research procedures used for the definition and interpretation of the processes observed are described by country as is the format used in each context to present the final report. The description of the schools and teachers is, however, left to a later chapter.

Bolivia

The Bolivian study coordinator initially engaged a team of four researchers (later reduced to three, Table 5) and organized the training using the approach and materials that had been part of the training sessions in Texas and Mexico. All researchers were involved in reading, discussions, and practice in observation as well as in keeping field notes. Once this phase had been completed, the team selected and approached the schools and teachers to be studied to explain the purpose of the work and secure their agreement. The initial period of observation had an exploratory character that omitted note-taking; it was meant to capture the children's adaptation efforts at the beginning of the school year and to enable the researchers to become familiar with the structure and mode of functioning of the schools. Formal observations began in March 1981 and, although notes were then taken, the observations remained largely unfocused with the purpose of simply describing events in classrooms and playgrounds.

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[5] Erickson (1977) describes the process as "pulling out from field notes a key incident, linking it to other incidents, phenomena, and theoretical constructs, and writing it up so others can see the generic in the particular, the universal in the concrete, the relation between part and whole."

Table 5. Summary characteristics of country projects.

	Bolivia	Chile	Colombia	Venezuela
Researchers in team	3	3	4	5
Schools	4	2	5	5
Grade level	Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary
Time of study	Mar.–Dec. 1981	Mar.–Dec. 1982	Oct.–Mar. 1981/82	Mar.–Dec. 1982
Report produced	Report	Book	Book	Report
Sponsoring institution[a]	CEBIAE	PIIE	CIUP	MINEDUC

[a] CEBIAE, Centro Boliviano de Investigación y Acción Educativa; PIIE, Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación; CIUP, Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional; MINEDUC, Planning Division, Ministry of Education of Venezuela.

The classrooms observed were selected at random from all the parallel classes of the 1st to 4th years in four schools in La Paz. Each classroom was observed four times in this initial period and the length of each observation varied depending on the situation at hand. Other school activities, such as lining up, civic acts, break periods, physical education, and crafts lessons, were also observed. Having completed the initial, unfocused phase, the team gathered to read and compare their field notes, trying to detect what events appeared especially significant within the school and classroom life. This analysis led to the construction of a first set of categories. The researchers soon realized, however, that, in this process, they were still very much influenced by their own theoretical background and that it was difficult to fit the data to some of the categories selected. Eventually, they found it necessary to abandon a whole group of categories and to move to a different way of looking at the field notes. This involved a simple and straightforward description, by school year, of the lessons observed, pooling together the information from all four schools. Once achieved, this description became the bulk of the first progress report submitted to the funding agency.

The second stage in the research involved returning to the schools and observing those events that had been highlighted by the previous analysis; four to five more observations per class were performed. This time, two observers went into each classroom and, to attain similar first-hand experience, the whole team of researchers worked in all of the schools in the study. Having examined the field notes from this focused stage, the researchers were able to produce a revised set of categories that would eventually help to structure the content of the final report. This analysis also indicated the need to explore more intensively the meaning of some of the events and issues that emerged; therefore, it was decided that a set of interviews was needed. These interviews were subsequently held with teachers, head teachers, secretaries, parents, community leaders, and street vendors around the school, as well as with pupils. The focus of these interviews was to explore the interviewee's perception of the role and importance of the school and his or her understanding of failure and success in school. In attempting to analyze the interview notes, the researchers had difficulty fitting them into all of the categories that had previously been established for the observation data; therefore, a more specific coding scheme had to be compiled. A third progress report containing this interview information was then written. The final report, in turn, resulted from discussion and analysis among the team of the three progress reports (de Crespo et al. 1982).

The Bolivian final report consists of two parts. First, there were descriptions of the significant events in the classroom, of school life as observed throughout the year, and of a set of interpretative elements provided by the categorization scheme used. Data are incorporated from the interviews and the report attempts to explore the relationships of the schools to their surrounding community. The themes discussed in this section, globally and not class by class, are

- Issues relating to the activities of teaching: e.g., styles, contents, modes of assessment, and observed learning difficulties;
- Issues relating to the communication process: teacher to pupil interaction, peer relationships, and pupil to teacher interaction; and
- Aspects of the community characteristics: family structure, community perceptions about the school, and school–community interaction.

Second, there was a focused analysis of the problem of school failure. To understand the problem, the researchers used their field data to report on both perceptions of school failure found among head teachers, teachers, parents, the community at large, and the children themselves as well as the classroom life situation that appeared to have contributed to the buildup of failure among the children. Also considered were those situations and structures in the school and in the community that could be associated with "failure" experiences.

Chile

The Chilean study itself was quite different in its procedures and focus from the studies in other countries. Two schools in the city of Santiago were selected for observation and within each school the 1st and 4th years were observed. The first was a municipal school, i.e., one that had recently been transferred from central to local control. To gain access to this school, the researchers had to obtain permission from the administrating municipal corporation. The second was a private but non-fee-paying school and access was achieved through direct contact with the head teacher, who, in turn, consulted with her teachers. The municipal school, with 1100 children, had a greater number of parallel classes, so that three 1st- and three 4th-year classes were observed. In the private school, with 600 pupils, it was only possible to observe one class per year.

The research coordinator selected a team of two other researchers (Table 5) with practice in structured observation techniques but, otherwise, with no training in ethnography. The training session was conducted in a form similar to that of the Texas and Mexico City experiences but over a shorter period. The team of three researchers observed each school intensively for an entire school year (March to December 1982), focusing their attention on classroom life, with some reference to other school events such as ceremonies and parent meetings. Parents, teachers, and pupils were also interviewed.

To provide some practice for the two researchers who were new to the project and to gain some insight into their differences in perspective, it was decided that initially two members of the team would observe each classroom jointly and produce an extended account of each session observed. After spending some time in this "warming-up" exercise, each researcher was

Public school assembly, Santiago, Chile.

assigned a class and remained as its sole observer throughout the school year. Field notes were always reorganized immediately or no later than 24 hours after each observation and care was taken to record everything in as much detail as possible. Some symbols were devised to make note-taking easier.

At frequent intervals, the team would gather to read and compare notes and try to assign meaning to events. This was carried out by posing questions or conveying impressions that were recorded but not responded to or discussed. As questions and notice of events mounted, there was more discussion about what had been observed. There was an effort to relate recent observations to earlier ones, focusing on situations that repeated themselves or contradicted each other. For example, a given lesson activity observed in the three parallel classes of one year would be discussed; by comparing notes, it could be noticed how lesson activities were structured within a period of time as well as the differences emerging from one context to another. All in all, these initial discussions eventually led to the formulation of what were considered to be tentative hypotheses.

A second stage was reached when a new and chronological reading was made of all notes, looking at each class separately. This led the team to reformulate the initial hypotheses and to produce new hypotheses. At the same time, their reading of some theoretical texts served to prepare them for the forthcoming process of interpretation. With all this material, they wrote a first descriptive report that was structured around each class and each school. The report helped to clarify the focus for the next stage of observations and interviews.

The third stage of the Chilean study was centred on the relationships between teachers and low-achieving pupils.

- How did particular forms of teacher–pupil interaction appear to affect the low achiever?
- How did these children behave toward the teacher?
- What did other children think of them?
- What was the general teaching–learning situation in these classes?

Field notes were analyzed in the same way as in the first stage, although significant events and situations were now appearing that would eventually shed a clearer light on the interpretation process. Once the potentially failing children had been identified, tape-recorded interviews with head teachers, teachers, pupils, and parents helped to achieve a greater understanding of each child's situation. These interviews, although focused on the specific issue of failure, were open-ended in the sense that each interviewee was given full opportunity to speak freely on topics not included in the questioning. The interview data were also read and analyzed by the whole team, with attention given to what appeared to be clues for understanding the development of situations of success or failure.

After this third stage was completed, all the material that had been gathered was read from the perspective of how failure is constructed within the classroom and of how the actors involved in this construction perceive their participation. This involved discussions of questions and hypotheses, changes in these, checking of impressions, and reaching interpretative agreements. All these procedures led finally to the production of an ethnographic report (Lopez et al. 1983) consisting of two parts:

- A descriptive account by school and class using the following outline: general characteristics of the class observed; the teaching–learning process; the classroom climate; evaluation procedures; socialization procedures; discipline; teacher–pupil relationships; peer relationships; teacher–observer relationships; teacher–parent relationships.
- An interpretative account of the process of construction of school failures or, as the authors called it, "the school culture of failure." The account of these interpretations is largely the subject of Chapter 8.

Colombia

As in the other countries, the research coordinator in Colombia recruited a team. This team initially consisted of the coordinator and three other researchers, but eventually was reduced to a team of three, as one researcher left to take up a fellowship in France (Table 5). The research coordinator conducted the initial training, which included learning about the theory and practice of ethnography. The five schools selected for the study (carried out during the school year 1981/82) were located around the federal district of Bogotá and the neighbouring department of Cundinamarca in central Colombia. Within each school, the 1st, 3rd, and 5th years were observed; however, two schools operated with one and two rooms, and all years grouped together. Contacts for entry were made through the educational authorities and, once access was secured, the researchers held a meeting with the teachers in each school to explain the purposes of their visits and their work. Although some teachers were not entirely happy about having these visitors, the researchers tried their best to allay their fears so that, eventually, only one of the schools approached decided not to participate in the study.

The same research procedures were used as in the other countries: classroom and school observations and semistructured interviews supported by documentary analysis. Observation was always conducted by two researchers. The arrival of these researchers was unannounced and not necessarily at the beginning of a lesson; nor was their departure always at the end of a lesson. To a certain extent, this prevented the teacher preparing material in advance, which, in a small rural school, might have been possible.

As in the other studies, the Colombian researchers began with unfocused observations, striving to record as much as possible of what they saw. They were guided by the dictum they had placed in a noticeable position in their office: "What is not written does not exist."

Each observer covered different areas of the classroom, taking care not to disturb the ongoing activities. Initially, as they examined their notes, they found they were focusing too much on what the teacher was saying. Later, they broadened their scope of attention to include what the children were saying or doing. Before 24 hours had elapsed, each pair of observers produced extended field notes that, nevertheless, did not include anything that had not already been recorded in some way. As time went on, the team realized that a better understanding of classroom events would be obtained if not only classroom but also other school activities were observed, e.g., entry of children, breaks, parent-teacher meetings, etc.

The interview sessions became a fairly important part of the research and concentrated on stimulating teachers, parents, and children to talk about important events in their life that they considered to have educational significance. Talking to teachers allowed researchers to gain insight into their views about education and about their own school and community. They were able to learn about what was called the teacher's "pedagogical discourse," to hear of their family and social relationships, and to consider how all this might affect their teaching practice. On the whole, these interviews took about 2 hours to complete. Teachers were selected on the basis of their willingness to be interviewed. Children, on the other hand, were selected on the basis of opinions expressed by the teachers. Parents who agreed were interviewed in group situations. Although there was a loose question guide, it only served to maintain some focus and was not strictly adhered to if the situation did not lend itself to the proposed structure. Finally, there were informal meetings with the teachers to discuss their views on issues such as school failure and assessment procedures.

To a large extent, the process of analysis and interpretation followed the pattern of the other studies, beginning with a more descriptive and ending with a more interpretative focus. The reflections of the project coordinator on this process are discussed in detail in Appendix 1; therefore, they are not dealt with here. Several types of reports were written during the whole research process. The reports focused on the descriptive account of the teaching styles and on the interpretation of school failure. The final report, which has since been published in Colombia (de Tezanos et al. 1983), is more than a simple descriptive and interpretative account of what was observed. It leads the reader through the research stages and the constant processes of interpretation and reinterpretation in which the researchers were involved. Its final chapter includes a consideration of the ambiguity in meaning ascribed to schooling and, hence, to success and failure by the various groups related to the educational process.

Venezuela

The study in Venezuela was started in February 1982. The five-member research team belonged to the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education (Table 5). Although most of them were sociologists, only one of them had been trained in anthropological methods of research. Thus, a period of training in ethnography was carried out as with the other teams. This training session closely followed the content and style of the Texas and Mexico meetings.

The five schools selected for the study, which are described in Chapter 5, differed not only on account of their location (urban and rural) but also in terms of their curriculum and administrative structure. Two observers entered each 1st- and 4th-year classroom in all schools. The initial stage of the study, from the beginning of March to the end of April 1982, consisted of 40 observations (45 minutes each). As in the other studies, these were unfocused attempts to capture as much as possible of the events in each classroom's life. The process of working with the field notes was similar to the method used in the other studies, with the team writing extended notes no later than 24 hours after the observation and holding periodic meetings to discuss notes, formulate questions, and make interpretations. The outcome of these meetings was a largely descriptive report that arranged the data in terms of what might be called classical pedagogical categories: first, the interaction processes as reflected in communication styles, modes of discipline enforcement, and expressions of warmth, respect, and cooperation; and, second, teaching strategies used to produce communication, arouse interest, and provide feedback, and techniques involved in assessment. The report included extensive examples from the observation notes to illustrate each category and included a bulky appendix with observation notes.

Having completed the first stage and critically analyzed their work to date, the researchers engaged in a new 2-month period of observation (same number and length of observations as the earlier ones) that centred on aspects of pupil–teacher interaction including pupil participation and the learning messages conveyed. Observation was extended to the rest of the school and its different routine and special event activities. At the same time, a number of unstructured interviews were held with teachers, parents, pupils, and other representatives from the community. The material from these interviews served to produce a more structured interview program and this new program was used with a group of 141 people. The content of these interviews focused on school events, views about success and failure, and school–community relationships. There were also questions about the various experimental programs in which some of the schools were involved, about the work carried out by teachers, and about views on teaching as a task and as a profession. Special fieldwork was conducted in relation to one of the schools that had the characteristic of being a "community school." The people in the area, teachers, pupils, and parents in this school were interviewed to explore how the school had become a community school and what effect it had had on the people living there.

As notes were gathered, they were examined and discussed by the team in a search for interpretative elements; this led to a reexamination of the early categorization scheme. As a result of this work, two further focused reports were written. The first report centred on a description of the schools, looking at their physical characteristics and their out of class routines, and then focused on the teachers as seen by themselves, by their pupils, by the observer, and by the representatives of the community. Although it looked at the pupils in general, the report also considered cases that appeared to be noticeable in view of possible success or failure. The second report was really a descriptive case study of the "community school." Finally, by using all these partial analyses and as a result of constant examination of their data, the researchers wrote a final report (Hernandez et al. 1983), which was divided into the following parts:

- Description of the physical facilities and of school routines;
- Characteristics of the school and community relationships;
- Teacher-pupil relationships in terms of communication and teaching strategies; and
- Perceptions about school success and failure by the various actors involved in the educational process.

The main difference between the Venezuelan study and those in other countries was that, throughout its various reports, emphasis on description rather than interpretation was preferred.

Summary

Summarizing the research procedures used in the four countries, there seem to be four main elements:

- The use of teams of researchers, all of whom observed, interviewed, and participated in the discussions and the process of interpreting what had been seen and recorded;
- The division of the observation periods into at least two stages: a general, unfocused stage that allowed familiarization with the setting to take place as well as detection of events that required further explorations; and a specific, focused stage concentrating on actors, relationships, and issues that were considered to be relevant to the study;
- A constant playback procedure for the analysis and interpretation of notes that involved the reading and rereading of the field notes; and
- The production, on the basis of the first three elements, of various types of partial reports, usually from different perspectives, although initially with a more descriptive rather than interpretative focus; the resulting final report was not a summary of the others, but a comprehensive reinterpretation of the material gathered.

The Coordination Activities

Among the initial agreements of the Bogotá meeting in May 1980 was that Beatrice Avalos should act as the overall coordinator of the project, maintaining contact with the research teams, visiting the sites, participating in coordination meetings, and pooling the findings for publication. Although only one meeting of coordinators was specifically funded, in fact, there were several opportunities for the researchers to meet, as they all had become members of a newly created network of educational researchers working with qualitative methods in Latin America. This network was also sponsored by IDRC.

The first opportunity for contact between the four country research teams came with the 6-week training program in Austin, Texas, and Mexico City. Toward the end of the Mexico training, the group discussed the implementation of the study in the various countries now that everyone had become familiar with the ethnographic approach that would be used. Unfortunately, not all research teams were able to begin at the same time. Complications at the ministerial level delayed the Venezuelan study until 1982 and lack of appropriate funding delayed the Chilean study, also until 1982.

This difference in timing made initial joint discussions of the projects somewhat difficult. The first opportunity to come together again was at a meeting of the Qualitative Research Network held in Buenos Aires in October 1981, and it served as a forum of discussion for the two countries, Colombia and Bolivia, that had progress reports at that date. In December 1981, a full meeting of the research teams was held in La Paz, Bolivia. By the time of this meeting, it had become clear that exciting work was being done. Since the training program in Austin and Mexico City, the researchers had made steady progress in choosing a small sample of schools, gaining the trust of teachers and head teachers, and exploring the interaction of schools and communities, teachers, and pupils, despite various political and administrative problems in some of the participating countries and institutions.

On the basis of the work done to date, the possibilities of establishing some common framework for the analysis of the fieldwork was discussed and broad categories were outlined that largely served as a basis for the Colombian, Bolivian, and, later, Venezuelan reports (see Appendix 2). Further contacts among the country coordinators were possible through their participation at two meetings of the Qualitative Educational Research Network held in Buenos Aires in late 1982 and in Bogotá in May 1983. By this time, a framework for publication had been agreed upon and decisions were made about the content of each of the country chapters in this book.

Although it might have been of value to publish summarized versions of each country's ethnographic reports, it was thought that a set of thematic chapters might be of greater interest. In this way, the four country chapters represent selected aspects of the study itself. The integrative chapter (8, by B. Avalos) is not just a synthesis of the four country chapters but draws upon material contained in the full country reports produced by each research team.

The choice of themes for the country chapters responds to three criteria. First, they provide the reader with a perspective of how a lot of teaching takes place by highlighting the situation in one context: the Colombian situation and, to a lesser extent, the situation found in structurally different types of schools in Venezuela. These chapters, as such, describe teaching but do not deal with the problem of failure (although the reports from which they are drawn do so). Second, they provide the reader with a picture of a "different" teacher (in terms of the approach to teaching and the education of most other teachers). There was a "different" teacher in every country, but the most striking example was found in Bolivia. The Bolivian teacher depicted was one who, in an unassuming way, secured a climate of friendship and work and produced a high number of successful students. Third, they provide a more detailed description of how, throughout occurrences of one school year, some children become candidates for repetition and drop out. This was the focus of Chapter 7 dealing with Chilean classrooms. Thus, only this and the integrative chapter specifically address the problem of school failure. All the other chapters, however, implicitly deal with the conditions that could lead to failure.

A difficult task was the overall analysis of work done and the gathering of the material that is now part of Chapter 8. This was largely the result of reading and rereading the country reports, of using some of the noteworthy transcripts of field notes (not all of which were cited in the country reports), and by searching for the common elements that could lend themselves to the type of interpretative categories that finally emerged. The entire content of this volume was discussed at various intervals with all the country coordinators.

Thus, this study is largely the result of the work of a team of researchers who came to know each other very well and to share a common view about the substance of the study and the research approach, but who also often disagreed with each other on forms of interpretation and other procedural matters and who approached the study in different manners and provided different perspectives from which to look at the entire collection of information. The outcome may not only be interesting for what it offers toward the understanding of teaching and learning in Latin America, but also as an account of a very different concept of research where individual contributions matter somewhat less than what is achieved as a group.

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School Settings

3

As explained earlier, the schools selected for the study were located in low socioeconomic communities, both urban and rural. Only those in Bolivia were solely urban; however, given the characteristics of the marginal areas of the city of La Paz, in other contexts, these schools were similar to some of the rural schools. Low socioeconomic status has been ascribed in this study to groups and communities where parents have little or no education (generally not more than a few years of schooling), are unemployed, or work as skilled or unskilled labourers. Some of the schools studied enrolled what we called lower middle-class pupils, i.e., pupils whose parents were small shop owners or were regularly employed in low-paid, white-collar jobs such as government clerks. Among these, there may also have been those who were unemployed at the time of the study. As for the teachers in these schools, their social origins can also be traced to lower middle-class or even working-class backgrounds, although in becoming teachers they would have considered themselves classified as members of the middle class. In most cases, the education of the teachers had taken place in Normal School and was roughly equivalent to 1 or 2 years beyond secondary school level. In spite of these commonalities of location and socioeconomic background, the schools and their people appear sufficiently distinguishable to justify a country by country description. Thus, with the exception of the Venezuelan study, whose schools are described in Chapter 5, this chapter examines the characteristics of the schools and their teaching activities in Bolivia, Chile, and Colombia.

Bolivia

All four schools in the Bolivian study (Table 6) were located in the highland margins of La Paz. Their communities were clearly distinguishable entities with a life of their own. The largest, with 200 000 people, was located in what is called El Alto of La Paz; the school area covered one of its *barrios* (neighbourhoods), called Villa Nuevos Horizontes. About 2600 people live in small, uniform houses built by the association of printers and factory workers (Confederación de Vivienda Fabril y Gráfica). In general, the population was young, but did include a few retired miners. Because of the unfulfilled promises of local authorities, most houses lacked main services; water, for example, had to be obtained on a daily basis from a cistern lorry. There was no sewerage and there was very little lighting in the area. The people had a chapel and a health post. However, as no provision had been made for a site or for building, the school had to function in six of the unoccupied houses of the neighbourhood. The surrounding streets were thus turned into playgrounds, allowing the local women to sell sweets and fruits to the school children.

Table 6. Characteristics of schools, teachers, and pupils in the Bolivian study.

	Pampahasi	La Portada	Villa Nuevos Horizontes	Tahuantisuyo
Location	Urban	Urban	Urban	Urban
Quality of building (space, light, facilities)	Inadequate	Average	Inadequate	Average
Size (no. of pupils)	235	618	460	387
Pupil socioeconomic status	Low	Low	Low to middle low	Low
No. of classrooms observed per year (1st to 4th year)	1	1	1	1
Teacher qualifications	Normal School[a]	Normal School	Normal School	Normal School
Teacher–pupil ratio[b]				
1st year	84, 74	120, 41	113, 52	123, 41
2nd year	64, 25	145, 41	108, 34	93, 45
3rd year	44, 33	145, 34	88, 38	74, 35
4th year	30, 43[c]	102, 45	84, 38	52, 52

[a] Teacher-training college.

[b] The first number represents registered pupils; the second number represents the children actually seen in class.

[c] The 4th and 5th years were in the same room.

Because of the improvised nature of the school, the classrooms were extremely small and the pupils were forced to take turns for seats during lessons.

Toward the western part of the city lies the sector called Pie del Alto. Here, there were some 3500 children of school age in a community of 9000 people. Men worked as labourers, artisans, factory workers, or municipal employees, while the women worked as street vendors, seamstresses, or knitters. There was light, water, and sewerage, but the services were not sufficient for the whole community. People were vociferous in demanding improvements and, because of this, had been accused of being a rebellious group. Compared with other areas of the city, however, the people of Pie del Alto were somewhat better off: they had a good transportation system and their school was among the better built and equipped of those visited in the Bolivian study. Its two-storey building housed three school shifts (morning, afternoon, and evening) and included a separate kindergarten. The rooms were big and lighted; however, the school lacked enough desks, sufficient seating space, and money to repair the broken windowpanes, through which the cold winter air can blow mercilessly. The head teacher's office contained a number of good books, but apparently they were rarely used. The municipal library was also underutilized. The playgrounds were spacious, but, unfortunately, were located on a cliff that overlooked a polluted stream used for drinking by chickens, dogs, and sheep, and for laundry by the local women.

In northern La Paz, also in the highland area, lies Tahuantisuyo. This is a completely rural community. Its small and colourless houses lacked proper roofing, there was no water, electricity, or sewerage, and only one line of buses transported people into the city. Some 2500 people lived here (400 families), most of whom were migrants from the Altiplano. They were normally or occasionally employed as construction labourers or as municipal workers. Women, besides their household activities, were knitters or street vendors, especially at the Sunday market. Like the other communities, Tahuantisuyo had a neighbour committee, a parent–teacher association, and a mother's club. These institutions were active in the care of their local school. If the school stood out as a protected enclave, it was because the people of these committees had pooled their efforts to build a surrounding wall that protected the children from the cold winter wind. The old part of the school had nine small classrooms housing the 2nd to 5th years; the new part, built by the parents, housed the three 1st-year classes. There was an enormous open area that served as a playground. The efforts of this extraordinary community had also provided the school with solar-heated showers, although many of the classrooms, because of unreplaced broken windowpanes, continued to be very cold.

School routines and classroom activities

Each of the schools observed had the five classes that make up the Basic Cycle of the Bolivian primary school, with at least two parallel classes for each year. No criteria for placing children in one or another of the parallel classes were obvious. The size of the classes ranged from 74 children in a 1st-year class to 33 pupils in a 3rd-year class. In the lower grades, the number of boys and number of girls were similar. In the higher grades, however, there tended to be more boys than girls.

In spite of slightly different rituals from school to school, most children began their day once the bell rang, running to form lines in front of their rooms or in the playgrounds, which were segregated by sex. They then waited until their teacher appeared (sometimes very late) to allow entry into the classroom. At the beginning of the week or on special occasions, a formal school assembly might take place before entering the classroom. Once in their rooms, lessons began somewhat like this:

> *Teacher* [to the class]: Sit down!
>
> *Teacher:* Good morning!
>
> *Class:* Good morning, madam!
>
> *Teacher:* What day is it today?
>
> *Class:* Friday, the 8th of May 1981.
>
> *Teacher* [begins the roll call, referring to the children by number]: One, two . . . .
>
> *Pupils:* Here, here . . . .
>
> *Teacher* [after the roll call is finished]: All right, now open the windows. I know many of you did not bring your notebooks, but use the rough ones and transfer your notes when you get home. We will now move on to lesson 4 on antonyms.

A common scene in all school grounds was the presence of women who, carrying babies on their back, walked backward and forward peering through the windows to see what their children were doing. At break time, like at any other school, wearing their aprons or overalls, the children rushed outside to play and perhaps to buy something from the women vendors; this was the world that, as the observer saw it, seemed to belong to the children. A different situation was that of the classroom; this clearly was the teacher's domain. The teacher's almost total control was evident when she was called out of the classroom for one reason or another: the children would then break loose, shouting, moving around, or playing, until the teacher returned and brought them back to order with the customary "Silence, silence! Where on earth do you think you are?"

The concept of discipline shared by teachers, pupils, and parents emphasized order within the school, silence in the classrooms, and tasks that had to be carried out exactly as prescribed. However, the school operated with few established rules, so that enforcement of discipline was largely the result of the personal judgment of the administrators, the *regentes,* and the teachers. The *regentes,* who could be defined as inspectors and disciplinarians, were mainly charged with stopping noise and ensuring that no child ran away from school. Within the classrooms, the more authoritarian teachers enforced their concept of law and order by ear pulling or detentions during break time.

> *Teacher:* Where is your homework?
>
> *Pupil:* I will do it next time.
>
> [The teacher pulls his ear.]
>
> *Pupil* [as the teacher pulls his ear]: Auuuuu!
>
> *Teacher* [pulling his ear again, says to another pupil]: Why are you doing your homework?
>
> *Pupil:* I couldn't . . .
>
> [The teacher hits him on the head and goes on checking homework in the same way.]

Teaching–learning activities were very similar in all classrooms and were based on recitation (question–answer sequences), dictation, and copying from the board. Math exercises were done by individual pupils at the board or as seat work, and language was learned by endless copying of the same words into their notebooks. This repetitive teaching style was characteristic of the 1st and 4th years alike. When asked, however, teachers distinguished their styles as being "inductive" or "collective," "analytic" or "investigative" in 4th year and "verbal" in 1st year, although their understanding of what this meant was largely confused.

> *Interviewer:* What methods do you use in teaching?
> *Teacher:* The analytic one.
> *Interviewer:* How would you describe it?
> *Teacher:* It consists of analyzing things.
> *Interviewer:* How do you develop your lessons?
> *Teacher:* Well, I use the method . . . well . . . it would be going from the easy to the difficult . . . that . . . that is all I could say.
> *Another teacher:* I use the ecletic, analytic, because we must know the area in which we work. I work with both methods.

Most of the teachers were unhappy about the official syllabus they were required to follow, considering it to be "pompous," "obsolete," and "irrelevant"; however, they were slavishly dependent on its guides to the point of not noticing the occasional obvious error.

> *Teacher:* This, about which we are speaking, the little animals and the timber trees which grow untouched by human hand are what we call natural resources; because, as you see, we do not plant timber trees, but, instead, we plant potatoes.

As previously mentioned, most classroom activities were entirely conducted by the teacher with little attention being paid to the attempted contributions of the pupils. Yet, if left alone, it was common to see the children trying to deal with their learning problems or showing signs of a questioning attitude.

> *Pupil* [to another as he reads from a newspaper handed to him by the teacher]: "We are Bolivians from our very bud"; what does this mean?

Questions such as this were seldom spotted by the teachers or used as input for their teaching activities.

The most frequently used means of assessment was homework. Teachers considered it to be an important learning device and spent 20–30 minutes every day correcting homework. In doing their homework, it was expected that the children would be helped by their parents. Parents did their utmost to comply with this requirement, which often exceeded the capabilities of those with little or no education.

> *Interviewer* [to a parent]: Do you help your children with their homework?
> *Parent:* Yes, I have to help them a bit with my wife, in whatever way we can; especially my wife helps my children a lot. As she has more education than me, it's she who helps most.

In spite of such parental interest, teachers often failed to understand their limitations and so complained about their lack of "cooperation": "Parents rarely help, they don't insist that their children do their homework. This is a problem for us."

The progress of children in school was registered in a booklet called *Libreta de calificaciones*, which noted both marks and attendance. Those children in 2nd to 5th year who failed to reach an acceptable standard repeated the year. Children in 1st year, according to the law, were to be automatically promoted. In practice, however, parents whose children were considered to be weak were persuaded by teachers to have their children repeat 1st year. These repeaters were seldom officially recorded as such.

Beyond their concern about "getting on" with the job of teaching, teachers, with some exceptions (see Chapter 7), did not appear to know or care much about their children's everyday life or to recognize the difficulties posed by their experiences. Only when there were problems of attendance did the teachers inquire about the home situation. Lack of response from the children to their learning requirements was often attributed in a depreciatory way to "introversion" or "bilingualism."

> *Interviewer* [to a teacher]: Do you have problems of bilingualism?
> *Teacher:* Yes, of course, there is a big problem because no matter how much I explain things they do not understand. Why? Because they cannot speak Spanish well. When they are here, they speak the little bit of Spanish they know, but when they get home and their parents only speak Aymara, then that's all they speak.

Pupils, parents, and the community

From semistructured interviews with teachers, parents, pupils, street vendors, and other community members, it was possible to learn about their life and their views of the school and its role in the community.

The average five-member family in the Bolivian communities of this study lived in two-room houses, which, in most cases, lacked basic services. The low family income caused even very small children to work both in and out of the home.

> *Interviewer* [talking to a pupil]: What do you do on Saturdays and Sundays?
> *Boy:* I go to work.
> *Interviewer:* Where?
> *Boy:* On the 28th line [of buses].
> *Interviewer:* Do your parents buy your school materials?
> *Boy:* They help, sometimes they add on . . . but because I work I have some money and buy them myself.

Most of the older children rarely went to the cinema and the few who had access to a set watched television for entertainment. The younger ones had few toys or distractions other than self-devised games. Poor life conditions also affected their health; many children showed signs of undernourishment even though their parents did what they could to provide at least three meals a day but these were generally meatless and rarely included cheese, eggs, or milk.

The communities had lively organizations such as neighbourhood committees, mother's clubs, youth clubs, and parent–teacher associations. By participating in one or another of these organizations, the people developed real concern for their schools. The school was often seen as "a place to learn" and as being "useful." People considered that if they had been able to attend school, they would have been spared from the harsh life they were leading. They hoped that, for their children, school would provide an opportunity to become "anything . . . a doctor . . . a carpenter . . . a locksmith." Only one of the community leaders interviewed considered the school to be a place where learning should contribute to social well-being.

> *Leader:* The main purpose of the school is to instruct in cultural things and then in social ones; pupils should learn to be formed, that is, they should receive there what later could help them to fulfill a role which should always include the defence of their social class.
> *Interviewer:* What do you mean by defence of their social class?
> *Leader:* Well, . . . that is the proletariat. What we always talk about is that we must defend the proletariat; you know, in our country we have always been left aside and this continues to be so.

Most of these community groups were conscious that for schooling to be efficient, school buildings should be adequate; therefore, they gave much of their personal free time to help with maintenance, decorating, or replacement of broken windowpanes.

The schools also reached out to the life and needs of the community by organizing occasional literacy courses or by offering talks to various community organizations. Two of the head teachers were personally active, for example, in petitioning on behalf of the community for running water and electricity. The teacher's contacts usually related to discussions about the children's progress, which involved visiting their homes or asking their parents to visit the school. Yet, although so many mothers hung around the schools during the day, there seemed to be little concern for making their presence useful.

The largest obstacle in the children's life at school was probably linguistic. In most homes, the only language spoken was Aymara, so there was little help or understanding on the part of the parents about what went on in school. Those parents who spoke some Spanish tended, in turn, to regard Aymara as a hindrance to moving on in life.

> *Interviewer:* What language do you speak to your children?
> *Parent:* Only Spanish!
> *Interviewer:* And what about Aymara?
> *Parent:* If I speak it, they don't understand or, rather, if they understand, they don't talk.
> *Interviewer:* So they can't talk? Are they losing their language? What do you think about this?
> *Parent:* It's better for them not to speak it!

Chile

The two schools in the Chilean study (Table 7) were located in an old central neighbourhood of Santiago; the other, in one of Santiago's densely populated marginal communities. The people of these areas belonged to the lower middle or working classes and had been seriously affected by the country's economic recession.

The municipal school began as a nonfee-paying private school but was later turned over to the State and, at the time of the study, had been recently placed under municipal control. The school had over 1000 pupils, who attended

Table 7. Characteristics of schools, teachers, and pupils in the Chilean study.

	Municipal	Private
Location	Metropolitan	Metropolitan
Quality of building (space, light, facilities)	Inadequate	Average
Size (no. of pupils)	1100	600
Pupil socioeconomic status	Low and middle low	Low and middle low
No. of classes observed		
1st year	3	1
4th year	3	1
Teacher–pupil ratio[a]		
Year 1(A)	41, 41	44, 44
Year 1(B)	46, 32	
Year 1(C)	45, 39	
Year 4(A)	42, 42	40, 33
Year 4(B)	44, 43	
Year 4(C)	42, 42	
Teacher qualifications	Normal School[b]	Normal School[b]
Teacher years of experience		
Year 1(A)	8	8
Year 1(B)	17	
Year 1(C)	27	
Year 4(A)	9	4
Year 4(B)	7	
Year 4(C)	16	

[a] The first value is for the beginning and second value is for the end of the year.
[b] University level.

the school in two shifts. Its premises were small and the kindergarten and one of the 1st-year classes were housed in a separate site, two blocks away. Eight of its 32 teachers, most of whom were women, had a secondary teaching certificate (involving university education).

The school was administered by a coordinating committee composed of the head teacher, the guidance counselor, the head of the technical department, and the school's inspector. Planning of teaching activities was done jointly by all teachers in the same year level. The school was considered to be one of the best in the neighbourhood, but had been forced to increase the number of children accepted to qualify for a better State grant, thus undermining, according to the head teacher, the quality of the education provided. At present, most of the classes had over 40 pupils.

The classroom space and equipment varied from room to room. The two 1st-year classes observed were very different. One of them was arranged in rows of two-seater desks aligned in the traditional way; it had a display area but no cupboard space for materials. The other 1st-year class was located in the annex building, which was also used in the morning for the kindergarten class. Because of this, the classes shared the same decor and the 1st-year children were able to enjoy the freedom of tables and chairs instead of fixed desks. The third 1st-year room was dark and cold and its only ornaments were a few posters with lettering on them. The children in this class sat in traditionally aligned rows of desks. Of this classroom, the observer noted, "It seems as though reality can be reached here only through what the teacher says; it is as if the world in this class had been bracketed."

The private school in the Chilean study belonged to a foundation that owned nine other primary, secondary, and vocational schools. It had 600 children who came mostly from working-class families. The school claimed to have its own objectives besides those of the government: these stressed respect for individual differences and personal development needs, as well as concern for the cultural and social life of the community. The physical facilities of the school were adequate and the two classes observed (1st and 4th year) had 44 and 33 children, respectively.

School routines and classroom activities

Both schools operated in the afternoon shift, which was 4½ hours long for the municipal school and 4¾ hours long for the private school. The schools differ little with respect to their daily routines (Table 8), which consisted of three blocks of lesson time of about 1¾ hours each separated by 10- to 15-minute breaks.

The Monday initial event was a patriotic assembly where everybody sang the national anthem as the Chilean flag was raised. School authorities used the occasion to impress upon the children the importance of patriotic, moral, and social values.

> *Guidance counselor* [to assembled school]: When we sing the national anthem we show our Chilean character and our respect . . . . This week we will be concerned with integration. I am happy to see that all the children play together.
>
> [Another occasion]
> As is usual at the beginning of the week, we select a special theme. This week, it will be a week of solidarity or friendship or comradeship. You will hear three of your mates. Listen to them!
>
> [Three boys read out something about solidarity and friendship that they had written themselves. When they finish, they are applauded.]

Extracurricular activities were common in both schools, especially around

Table 8. Typical timetable for all classes.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		1st year		
Homeroom activities	Maths	Spanish	Maths	Spanish
Spanish	Spanish	Maths	Spanish	Maths
Spanish	Science	Maths	History	Art
History	Science	Maths	History	Physical education
History	Music	Art	Handicrafts	Physical education
		4th year		
Homeroom activities	Physical education	English	Spanish	Writing
Spanish	Maths	Spanish	Maths	Social sciences
Social sciences	Maths	Natural sciences	Technical education	Social sciences
Social sciences	Maths	Social sciences	Natural sciences	Music
Natural sciences	Technical education	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish

the time of patriotic festivities, when a lot of preparation was required. Sometimes teachers felt that pressure was excessive in this respect; the head teacher of one of the schools explained:

> We are a bit overwhelmed with so much extracurricular activity in this school. We also lack space. We have to work with several different groups at a time: the transit brigades which are trained by a policeman, the band which is rehearsed by an army instructor in preparation for the 21st of May parade (a national naval festivity), a choir which rehearses the Red Cross hymn and a gardening group that works with its instructor. We are in the ecology month and I would like to see the school filled with plants. We also have a sports and folk group.

Life in the playground was like that in any other school, with children running about, playing, conversing, or eating the food they had brought from home or bought at a kiosk. The children appeared to prefer playmates of the same sex, a situation that perhaps was reinforced by the requirement to form lines according to sex when entering the classroom after break. Both schools emphasized external order and discipline. The municipal school organized its children into security brigades charged with enforcing discipline in the playground.

Inside the classrooms, the children experienced very teacher-centred forms of relationships that could be kind and, at times, caring, or, as in the example below, harsh and authoritarian.

> [A 1st-year class is asked to bring money to buy paraffin for heating the room. The teacher scolds those who did not bring the money.]
> *Teacher:* Listen children, I want Marcelo Barra to collect the money for the paraffin; but I see some of you did not bring it.
> *Pupil* [shouting from his desk]: Nancy brought it but won't give it in!
> *Teacher:* Your mothers give you the money at the beginning of the month and yet you do not bring it!
> *Teacher* [with threatening tone]: Don't let me have to get up and search your pockets.
> *Teacher* [to Marcelo]: Walk through the class again!
> *Teacher* [as one of the pupils produces the money]: Look how the money is appearing!

In the municipal school, children were free to move around their classrooms in the annex building only; this was because they shared furniture with the kindergarten. Children were allowed to circulate freely, although occasionally their teacher reminded them to be still and quiet. There was no rigid adherence to a timetable as in the rest of the school, probably because, in the annex building, there was no bell to remind pupils of the time. This allowed the teacher to vary the content and length of the lessons depending on what the situation required.

The modes of enforcing discipline, i.e., attention, silence, or work, were different from classroom to classroom. There was no apparent established code of behaviour, so each teacher had his or her own norms that might or might not be made explicit to the children. There were extreme cases of arbitrariness where both the norm and the correction appeared to be more an exercise of the teacher's whim than an objective rule, e.g., constant requests for silence when the room was calm or children being scolded undeservedly.

Corporal punishment is not allowed in the Chilean system of education, but, in some instances, teachers did use mild forms of physical correction such as a slap on the head or the pulling of ears or hair. A commonly used form of controlling misbehaviour that was found in Colombian classrooms (see Chapter 4) was to have children change their posture or do some movement exercise.

> *Teacher:* Now, all of you! Cross your arms! Last week, we were working on these words . . . . It was Thursday or Friday.
>
> *Teacher* [to a pupil]: Don't throw yourself about! Sit down straight! Don't lie about!

In all the classrooms, the pattern of teaching was similar, with an emphasis on recitation, syllabic reading, dictation, and the copying of exercises from the board. A typical learning and assessment device was the *cuestionario,* i.e., a set of questions and answers the teacher wrote on the board for the children to copy and memorize. The *cuestionario* was used later as a means of testing whether the children had learned the material.

> *1. What is climate?* It is the general state presented by the weather.
>
> *2. What is the weather?* It is the state of the air in one or two days.

There was only one classroom where misbehaviour was clearly linked to poor teaching strategies; curiously, this teacher appeared to be one of those who were genuinely concerned and cared for the children.

> *Teacher:* Let's see boys, listen to what we will do today!
>
> [The teacher turns to a girl and asks something unrelated to what he has just said.]
>
> *Several children:* Loreto!
>
> *Teacher:* Yes, the marks for art! I will mark every piece of work. You will not have a summative test. Let's see, let me have a Spanish book! In this lesson . . . .
>
> [The teacher interrupts himself to ask some children to stop talking.]
>
> *Teacher:* All right, get your drawing paper out! Which are the warm colours?
>
> [Several children raise their hands.]
>
> *Teacher:* Jacqueline?
>
> [The girl does not answer; some children talk.]
>
> *Teacher:* Silence, Gonzalez!
>
> *Girl:* Yellow, red, orange!

This lesson continued in a confusion of questions, calls for silence, and activities that were either carried out incompletely or not at all, while the teacher tried fruitlessly to stop the disorder.

Teaching in most classes tended to follow a similar structure, with instructions being provided at the beginning of the lesson. These instructions were followed by homework checking, by some sort of pupil activity such as reading, or by questioning. This, in turn, was followed by explanations, writing a *cuestionario* on the board for the children to copy, or by requesting that the children copy something out of their books. The teachers' understanding of "teaching children to think" appeared, on the whole, to be very confused. Mostly, it seemed to be interpreted as leading the pupils to "analyze" something within the teacher's personal frame of reference. This meant that the children were submitted to probing sequences that generally terminated with the teacher's summary in her own words or in the textbook's words.

Teacher [asking questions contained in the textbook]: Let's see: why is movement important to animals? Who can answer this question? Don't shout as if you were out in the market!

Pupils [shouting]: Me, me, me!

[As the teacher calls on different pupils, they respond.]

Pupils: To survive. To catch prey. To live. To eat. To go home. To defend themselves.

Teacher: Yes, it is essential for animals to be able to do several things such as hunt, live . . . so now we will write the answer to this question on the board?

Teacher [writing]:

Question: Why is movement important to animals?

Answer: Movement, in animals, allows them to search actively for food.

Comprehension in reading was often relegated to secondary place; as long as intonation and punctuation were respected. In the same vein, presentation and cleanliness of a task were more important than its content.

Only in one of the classrooms (1st year) were assessment activities a natural part of the teaching and learning situation and not purely a threatening condition for giving marks. The teacher introduced the children gradually to the notion that a test situation required certain rituals such as silence and individual work, but she took care to avoid associating evaluation with competitiveness.

Teacher: Now children, we are going to work, we are going to do something where you will not move nor talk to each other. Take out your pencils and erasers and whatever coloured pencils you have . . . . I will give you a sheet of paper, but don't turn it until I tell you to do so.

Teacher: I want everyone to read carefully and to do what is requested on your own, so the teacher will know who needs more help to learn their lessons.

Alfonso: Yes, because we have to learn little by little; isn't it true, Miss?

Looking at other features of classroom life in these Chilean schools, it was interesting to notice how spontaneous forms of collaboration developed among the children: e.g., using each other as sources of information before going to the teacher.

Pupil [to another]: Is there a full stop after this?

Pupil: Yes.

[On another occasion, the pupils are looking words up in the dictionary.]

Pupil [to another]: What is "bug"?

Pupil: A vermin! [Looks at notes.] Yes, a vermin!

Pupil [laughing]: A vermin?

Another pupil [distracted]: What is that?

In some classes, boys were treated differently from girls. For example, in one case, the practice of continuously questioning boys rather than girls had led the teacher to believe that "although there were intelligent girls in her class," they were "less so than the boys." Yet, in this class, the boys had in fact assumed a mediating role by which they transmitted to the teacher the questions the girls wanted to ask. In another class, there was a definite grouping of pupils into the "boy" and "girl" categories.

Boy: Teacher, you said you were going to question the girls today!

Teacher: Question about what?

> *Girls* [almost all of them]: No, that was to be for science!
> [Teacher calls the roll: boys first, then girls.]

This type of categorization was expressed in another class, where girls were called by their first name and the boys were called by their surname.

Turning to the teachers and to their self-perceptions, there were those who felt happy with their work, satisfied that by the end of the year their children would have learned to read. Others, however, felt quite tired: "They are so difficult! I am so tired! I don't feel like doing anything!" A noticeable characteristic of many teachers was what one might call professional loneliness. This came across strongly in the way they related to the observers who visited their classes. In practically every case, there was a friendly reception and, in time, they were eager to speak about themselves, their difficulties, and their insecurities, and to seek advice.

> *Teacher* [to the observer]: Do you write down everything I say? Even the fact that I shout every once in a while? I feel bad about my shouting. . . . They [the pupils] make me shout so much, I find myself constantly having to tell them that I will have to punish them if . . . .

Colombia

In the Colombian study, five schools were observed (Table 9). The only metropolitan school location in the study was in one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Bogotá. Having been the habitat of the rich in the 19th century, the area was now a run-down living quarter for the lowest wage earners of the city. Most houses were in a bad general state of repair, having been built with discarded cartons and corrugated zinc sheets. The school, however, was new and functional, with enough space and equipment for its 490 pupils. The sun reached the upper part of the building, so that the first-floor rooms were warm and well lit; the ground floor, however, was cool and dark by comparison. The playground, although spacious, suffered from winter flooding. There were at least three parallel classes for each of the 5 years of the primary level and the average number of children per class was 30. All the teachers had a Normal School teaching certificate and some 13 years of experience, although at least two had reached retirement age. Ten of the teachers were also pursuing part-time university studies to improve their status and salary.

Two hours away from Bogotá, to the northeast, at an elevation of about 2600 m, is the municipality of Ubate. Its name, which stems from the Chibcha language, means "bloodshed" and reminds the natives of the violent clashes between the Indians and the Spanish at the time of the conquest. Under the rule of the Muisca Indians, Ubate had been a flourishing community; however, the greed of the Spanish *encomenderos* (feudal landowners) brought decay. The present official existence of the city dates back only to 1952. Its people are farmers who produce potatoes, wheat, barley, and corn, and raise cattle; some are coal miners. Most of the farms are small, although a few lie on rich and extensive plots of land.

The school in the town of Ubate was a full 5-year primary institution with two classes per year. On average, each teacher had 30 children per class and two-thirds of these pupils were girls. The children were aged from

Table 9. Characteristics of schools, teachers, and pupils in the Colombian study.

	Policarpo Salvatierra	Chaleche	El Cedro	El Cerro	La Concordia
Location	Urban	Rural	Suburban	Rural	Metropolitan
Quality of building (space, light, facilities)	Average	Good	Inadequate	Average	Good
Type of school (no. of rooms per school year)[a]	Multiroom (1 to 5)	One room (1 to 5)	Multiroom	Two room (1, 5, and 2,3,4)	Multiroom
Size of school (no. of pupils)	300	52	115	65	490
Pupil socioeconomic status	Low and middle low	Low	Low	Low	Low
No. of classrooms observed per year (1st, 3rd, and 5th year)	1	1	1	1	1
Teacher qualifications	Normal School[b]	Normal School	Normal School	Normal School	Normal School

[a] The experimental Escuela Nueva program implemented in rural areas operates in one- or two-room schools.
[b] Teacher-training college.

7 to 16 years. The school building was a refurbished colonial house. The old balcony and windows were still there, but the rest of the building had been altered to provide appropriate conditions for school activities. Each room had two or three windows, twin desks, cupboards, and pictures of the Sacred Heart and national heroes such as Simón Bolívar and Federico Santander. There was a kitchen, but there was no office for the head teacher, no library, and no rooms for the medical services. Most of the children who attended this school were born in the region and their parents worked as farm labourers, house servants, or auto mechanics. Half of the children lived in Ubate and those further away had about a 1-hour walk to school every day. Over half of the teachers were more than 40 years old and had 20 years or more of experience. The teachers all had Normal School certificates (Higher or Rural certificates) and two of them had completed their secondary baccalaureat.

Also in the district of Ubate, along the road joining the towns of Sesquile and Guatavita, was the next school included in the study. Before the arrival of the Spanish, this part of the country was populated by Indians who worked with gold. The area includes the famous lake, which presumably still hides an enormous treasure in gold, recounted in the legend of El Dorado. The area suffered a major upheaval when, in 1967, the Guatavita reservoir was built, swamping, as the people say, "the best land" around. The outcome of this situation was a heavy migration toward other nearby areas or to Bogotá. People were still moving out at the time of the study because of bad crops and severe drought. The parents of the children who attended this school were very poor and many were quite undernourished. The school, which operated within the Escuela Nueva program, had one teacher. The Escuela Nueva program began in 1976 as a development of the earlier one-room school system, which had begun experimentally in 1961 in the province of Santander. As the Escuela Nueva program operates now, it offers full primary education (6 years) to rural children within a system of flexible administrative and teaching activities linked to the needs of rural communities. Building on the tradition of the one- or two-teacher school patterns that existed in rural Colombia, teachers in the Escuela Nueva program are being trained in the principles of Enseñanza Activa (activity-centred instruction). For this purpose, they receive from the Ministry of Education a set of teacher's guides and worksheets or texts for pupils that present the curricular contents in the form of objectives and specified learning activities to attain these objectives. As stipulated in the program, the teacher's role is to stimulate and guide pupils in the use of their materials and in the choice of learning activities. Teachers must also carry out continuous diagnostic assessment. Pupils, organized in groups of three or four, work on these activities. Their progress to the upper level depends upon successful completion of their projects. Strictly speaking, in these schools, there should be no repetition but simply a faster or slower rate of progress through the syllabus and its related activities. There also should be no rigid timetables, so that different groups of pupils could, at the same time, be involved in different activities.

In the Escuela Nueva program, it is envisioned that links with the local community be stimulated by engaging parental help in the school, by having pupils carry out various types of improvements within the community, and by collecting and storing information about the community within the school. It is also envisaged that the school should organize projects that are beneficial to the community, such as opening up its library or constructing the agricultural calendar for the region.

Pupils in the Escuela Nueva system should be involved in various activities related to discipline, cleaning, decorating, and gardening, as well as to the organization of cultural events. Pupils and teachers should also set up the *rincones de trabajo,* i.e., corners within the classroom allocated to the different subjects and containing materials such as flora and fauna specimens or posters showing the results of investigative activities of the pupils.

To teach in this program, teachers attend four 1-week training workshops dealing with the principles of the program, the use of its materials, and information about its communication strategies. To ensure that the system works well, a regional coordinator and a team of co-workers, acting as supervisors, visit the schools, maintain contact with the teachers, offer lectures about various topics, and help the teachers carry out their activities. To date, more than 1600 rural schools are operating within this scheme (for details on the Escuela Nueva program, see Mora 1981).

Lessons in the Escuela Nueva program normally were developed for all years together in one big, well-lit classroom, although, if necessary, a second room was used. The teacher held a Normal School certificate and was also attending night lectures at the university in Bogotá: because of this, she lived in the city and travelled every day by bus to the school. She had experience teaching in the traditional school but preferred the Escuela Nueva system.

Some 20 km north of Bogotá lies the municipality of Chia, where, at an altitude of 3100 m, the fourth school included in the study was located. To reach this school during the winter, it was necessary to walk up the road for an hour; only during the summer could a motor vehicle be used. The people in the area are of Muisca Indian origin. They are small farm owners or labourers. Their main crop is potatoes because other produce, such as fruits, vegetables, and cereals, is not marketable, because of the lack of appropriate technology. Cattle raising and dairy farming are also important activities and there were some indications of flower cultivation. In summer, water is scarce and this affects agriculture as well as the availability of drinking water. There were no sewers or drainage facilities. The school building had a good roof but no proper ceiling and consisted of two well-lit rooms. It functioned within the Escuela Nueva program and had 65 pupils. In the classrooms, the pupils worked at individual desks and could use the books placed on shelves in each room. The big assembly room was used not only by the school but also by the local community association. Another smaller room was used by the teachers as a staff room and as a storage area for teaching materials. Toilet facilities were inadequate, especially in the summer when there was no water. Around the school building, the fields served as gardens as well as an improvised soccer ground. All the pupils lived in the area, so the longest journey for any one of them was about a 30-minute walk. The two teachers had Normal School certificates and some experience in rural schools and, at the time of the observation, both had been at the school about 4 years.

The final school studied in Colombia was a semirural school located in Zipaquira. In the past, this region had been noted for the production of salt. Its people, of Muisca Indian descent, still remember the great ovens used for the salt. The cultural and political autonomy enjoyed in the past because of the marketing of salt was largely lost when the government nationalized the industry and subjected the area to the federal capital's control. What once had been a beautiful region was now a victim of industrial pollution. The town of Zipaquira is laid out in the typical Spanish style of a central square with architectural symbols of the local powers around it: the church and the town hall buildings. The townspeople work either as small entrepreneurs or in transportation services. The school was housed in a building that had been a Catholic seminary. This building was inadequate because of its small size and dark rooms; it was also insufficiently equipped, especially with respect to desks. All 5 years of primary school, with some 120 children were distributed in 15 classrooms. Most of the 14 teachers had Normal School certificates or specialized musical and technical training.

School routines and classroom activities

The normal school day for children in all the schools observed began at 0800 and ended just before 1300, with one or two break periods. However, especially in the rural and semirural schools, this order was not always observed. For example, in one of the schools, teachers arrived about 30 minutes late each day because of transportation difficulties. The children, nevertheless, were instructed to deal with the situation by proceeding on time to their classroom and beginning work they had been assigned the previous day. At another school, the observers frequently found the teachers sitting out in the sun chatting, while the children were in the classrooms carrying on with their work. At certain times, once a month, teaching activities in these schools were suspended to allow teachers to collect and cash their paychecks.

Much of the style of teaching found in these classrooms is described later in Chapter 4. What stands out, in general, is the conflict experienced by the teachers between a syllabus that they considered should be covered in the school year and the obvious need to pace teaching according to the children's situation and capacity. An added burden on the teachers was the large number of forms sent out by the central bureaucracy; completion of these forms took up much of their preparation and marking time. This, in part, might explain the tedious pattern of teaching that was found in many classrooms and is described in the following chapters. Also, the lifeless mode of conducting classroom activities was related to what was handed down to the teachers by their authorities within the system. An example of this was gleaned at a meeting of teachers with their district supervisor. Some of his lecture to the teachers was as follows.

> *Supervisor:* The Ministry of Education has placed me in this municipality. One of my tasks is to examine together with the teachers the way in which pupils learn. I don't only mean the preparation of a lesson but also the mental phenomena that go with the learning process. In order for this process of learning to take place, it should have the following characteristics. This mental process should have the following.
> [He writes on the board.]
> a) there must be a sensation
> b) there must be a perception
> c) there must be an abstraction
> [He goes on speaking.]
> There must be some judgments about what is being learnt [sic].

In the fifth place, there must be an expression, a generalization and the last stage, in which we are failing, is the application.

[He goes on speaking like this for about 30 minutes, while some teachers tried meekly, but vainly, to put in a word.]

[He eventually turns his attention to geography.]

Supervisor: Every geographical fact has these aspects; second, in relation to maps, they must be placed in the relation in which they really are: the north to the north. The map must be laid on the floor in relation to the cardinal points.

[He writes on the board.]

maps
world-map
lithographic map
individual map

In relation to this, I have a congestion [sic] as to whether the child should do it himself or copy it; if he does it himself the country's shape will be disfigured. If he copies it, the shape will not be disfigured.

Teachers: Disfigured?

Supervisor: In relation to the problem with Venezuela [referring to a boundary problem between Colombia and Venezuela], little attention has been paid to the disfigurement of our country.

Teacher [whispering to the observer]: He's improvising!

Supervisor: This is a pure speculation of mine: by copying it, the shape of our country will not be disfigured.

Teacher [at the back]: He doesn't know how to trace!

The conceptual confusion and the authoritarian mode of communicating his message are clearly scorned by the teachers in this meeting, yet the very same teachers conducted their lessons along similar lines of confusion and with similar dogmatism.

Pupils, parents, and the community

The typical mode of communication between schools and parents was meetings; at these meetings, the children's reports were handed out to parents and problem cases were discussed. Most of the teachers, perhaps because they did not originate from the community of the school, had difficulty in understanding the local situation and appreciating its culture and history. They spoke, therefore, as outside professionals and placed demands that they considered important in view of the school's interests but that did not necessarily relate either to the parents' needs or wishes: e.g., money, help with the school garden, and products to be sold in the school cooperative, which then would be bought by the donors themselves.

One of the most difficult situations in the communication between schools and parents, particularly in the Escuela Nueva type of school, was to convince parents of the value of the "progressive" educational policies established by the State. From the opinions expressed in meetings and interviews, it seemed that the parents whose children attended a rural school resisted the idea of school reproducing community daily life (e.g., providing practical knowledge about irrigation and crops). The function of the schools, they considered, was to teach children how to read, add, subtract, and multiply. They objected to methods they thought were ineffective for this purpose, such as reading-readiness exercises. There were cases where parents took their children out of the school because they had not learned to count. In view of such situations, some teachers felt it better to forgo the less tangible objectives of the so-called "progressive" education and concentrate on the traditional ways of teaching maths and reading.

The rural schools in the study seemed largely unaware of what the community in which they functioned was like and, hence, did not find meaningful modes of establishing links with it. For example, in one community where most women were knitters, the teacher was bent on having the children learn how to till the land. On the whole, it appeared that traditional views of what a community should be prevailed, with little attention given to the changes produced by migration or transistor radios.

Outside the school, the life of the children varied from situation to situation. The urban children easily fell prey to the underground culture of the city. Many children whose families were not firmly structured ran off on their own to lead the life of *gamines* while continuing to attend school. The rural child, after performing as a child and pupil in the mornings, returned home, only to go out again to the fields or to earn money performing some other task. On market day, many children were required to stay away from school to help their parents sell their produce.

As they reflected upon their experiences, the children varied in their appreciation of the role of the school. For some, "it is important to stay in school to learn things and be better." For others, school "only helps to become a servant of rich people," but, for many, the school was considered a place in which to be children.

> *Interviewer* [talking to Ramón]: Do you like school?
> *Ramón:* Yes, madam!
> *Interviewer:* Why do you like school?
> *Ramón:* Because there are many children and we play and we make friends and we play and we get gifts . . .
> *Interviewer:* Yes, and who gives you those gifts?
> *Ramón:* The other children.
> *Interviewer:* And what do they give you?
> *Ramón:* Refreshments and Tan [a soft drink].
> *Interviewer:* And don't you get that at home?
> *Ramón:* Uh?
> *Interviewer:* Don't you get refreshments at home?
> *Ramón:* No.
> *Interviewer:* What do you drink at home?
> *Ramón:* *Agua de panela* [a residue from sugar processing] with milk.

The children in this study were mostly brought up in homes that exercised a more authoritarian type of relationship than that conventionally found in middle-class homes.[1] Largely, hard work and the struggle to survive make it difficult for parents to relate to their children in ways other than by satisfying their basic needs. In school, however, these children were able to experience a more personal kind of care and attention from their teachers. In this respect, it did seem that schools had a deeper existential meaning for the children than the dull contents and teaching methods found in their lessons might lead one to believe.

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[1] As explained by de Tezanos et al. (1983: 122), as a result of her visits to homes and interviews with parents: "Among these social groups there practically is no dialogue with children except for the giving of orders. Silence towards parents is considered a form of respect for their authority . . . . Likewise, affective contact between parents and children is very restricted. Given their economic situation these parents have little time to give their children when they are together; time is for working not for enjoying leisure."

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de Tezanos, A., Munoz, G., Romero, E. 1983. Escuela y comunidad. Un problema de sentido. Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia.

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Styles of Teaching in Colombian Classrooms

4

Araceli de Tezanos

It is common understanding that the concept of school failure has strong cultural contents.

In searching for an understanding of the issues related to children's failure in school, it seemed essential to describe the style of teaching[1] found in the Colombian schools observed. In this chapter, we first present a set of expanded notes from an observation of a 3rd-year lesson to illustrate the style of teaching used. Second, we engage in a first-level analysis of these notes from two perspectives: the theme of the lesson and the teacher–pupil interactions. Third, an interpretation of these findings is attempted along the lines of the research questions common to this study.

The Observation

The structure of the following lesson includes five clearly delimited steps: setting the classroom climate, checking homework, development of main theme, note taking by the children, and review of main theme. Each of these steps, seen from the perspective of didactics, has a specific goal; in addition, each step acquires its meaning from the overall purpose of the lesson that, in turn, gives unity to the lesson itself.

Setting the classroom climate

Teacher: All stand! Arms up, down! Sing!
Pupils [suggesting songs]: "The canaries," "The crazy witch"!
Teacher: The canaries!
[The children stand and sing as they clap their hands.]

Checking homework

Request

Teacher: We had some homework to do, didn't we? What was the homework we had for today?
Pupils [together]: Maths . . . do numbers.

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[1] This description, conceptualized as "forms of delivery," was developed in the full report of the study of de Tezanos et al. (1983). It refers to a set of recurrent patterns in the teacher–pupil interactions observed within an ethnographic perspective.

Oral correction

Boy: From one hundred to ten thousand.
Teacher: How many units are there in one hundred?
Girl: One.
Teacher: How many units . . . units?
Girl: One.
Boy: Ten.
Pupils [together]: One hundred.
Teacher: One hundred what?
Pupils [together]: Units.
Teacher: Oh, one hundred units, so then how many units do the hundreds have?
Boy: Ten.
Another boy: One hundred.
Teacher: One hundred what?
Pupils: Units.
Pupils: Hundreds.
Teacher: So we have one hundred units; how much do we have if we add another one hundred?
Teacher: Let's see who will come and write the number, the first number, let's see. Come over . . . .
Boy [at the back]: I, I would like to . . . .
Teacher [cleaning the chalkboard]: You would like to . . . . Come! Let's see!
[The boy goes to the board and writes "100."]

Looking at exercise books

Teacher: Now, all of you, open your exercise books! We are going to check your homework to see how you did it.
Girl: I had up to ten thousand.
Teacher: Let's see. Let's see because you're supposed to get a mark for that work, no?
Pupils [together]: Yes, senorita!
Teacher: Let me have a red pen.
[The teacher begins to look at the homework moving through the rows of children.]

Development of main theme

Teacher: So we were saying . . . .
Teacher: So come over, let's see . . . .
Pupils [calling out]: Me senora Elvira, let me!
Teacher: And draw a unit, will you draw a unit?
Pupils: Me, senora Elvira, me!
[A boy goes to the board.]
Teacher: Draw anything, whatever you want.
Another boy [calling out]: And afterwards, me!
[There is noise from the children.]
Teacher: Well, now look at this little picture, let's see!
Boy: A girl!
Teacher: So, what does it seem to you?
Pupils [together]: A girl!
Teacher: A girl, a doll, what else?
Pupils: An element.
Teacher: What does this girl, this doll mean to us in maths?
Pupils [together]: An element.
Teacher: What?

Pupils [together]: An element.
Teacher: An element, a what?
Pupils [together]: A unit.
Teacher: And there is only one what?
Pupils [together]: Only one object.
Teacher: No, is it an object? Can a person be an object?
Pupils [together]: No, only one unit.
Teacher: Only one picture, no?
Boy: It's only one doll.
Teacher: If there is only one doll what does this doll represent?
Pupils [together]: An element.
Teacher: Let's see; Carlos, what does this drawing represent?
Carlos: An element.
Teacher [with acknowledging tone]: An element, say it in another form!
[The children seem doubtful.]
Pupils [together]: A set.
Teacher: A what, a what?
Pupils [together]: A unit.
Teacher: A unit, then here there is a unit because there is only one . . . object.
Teacher [showing the pens]: If we have here . . . what do I have in my hands?
Pupils [together]: Two pens.
Teacher: Let's see, count them [she shows one and then the other].
Pupils [together]: One, two.
[The teacher picks up the pens she had left on the desk and shows them to the children as they continue to count.]
Pupils [together]: Three, four, five.
Boy [at the back]: Three elements, four elements, five elements.
Teacher: So, will you count again?
Pupils [together]: One, two, three, four, and five.
Teacher: I have five what?
Pupils [together]: Elements.
Teacher: No, what is it?
Pupils [together]: Pens.
Teacher: Pens, what are they used for?
Pupils [together]: To write.
Teacher: Yes, to write. So in relation to sets, what do I have?
Pupils [together]: A set.
Teacher: A group of what?
Pupils: Elements.
Pupils: Pens.
Teacher: A group of what?
Pupils [together]: Of several elements.
Teacher: Very good! Here I have a group of several . . . ?
Pupils [together]: Elements.
Teacher [as she shows the pens]: How many elements do I have here?
Pupils [together]: Five.
Teacher: Five, and these five little pens represent a . . . ?
Pupils [together]: Set.
Boy: Element.
Teacher: A what?
Pupils [together]: A set, a set.
Teacher: Let's see, the girl at the back, what is a set?
[The girl at the back begins to answer but cannot be heard.]
Teacher: Be quiet, only one should talk!
Girl [at the back]: A set is a group of elements.

An outdoor class in Bogotá, Colombia.

Teacher: Of several elements. Is that all?
Girl [at the back]: No.
Teacher [to another girl]: Let's see, your highness, what is a set?
Girl: A set is a group of several elements.
Teacher: Of several elements, and here how many elements do we have?
Pupils [together]: Five.
Teacher: Let's not say element! Let's say it differently.
Pupils [together]: Units.
Teacher: What?
Pupils [together]: Units.
Teacher: Units, a group of several . . . ?
Pupils: Units.
Teacher: How many units do we have here?
Pupils: Five.
Teacher: Five, because the unit is represented by each one of these?
Pupils: Pens.
Teacher: Pens. The unit is represented by each one of these pens. So if we have here five pens, how many units do we have?
Pupils [together]: Five.
Teacher: Five what?
Pupils [together]: Units.
Teacher: So, come here Esperanza and draw a . . .
Pupils [shouting]: Patricia, Patricia.
Teacher [without acknowledging that she had mistakenly called the girl by another name]: . . . set. Whichever you want.
Girl [with protesting tone]: She is called Patricia not Esperanza.
Teacher: How many umbrellas did you draw?
Pupils [together]: Four.
Teacher: Those four umbrellas then, what do we call them?
Pupils [together]: A set.
Teacher: A . . . ?
Pupils [together]: A set.
Teacher: A set of how many umbrellas?
Pupils [together]: Four.
Teacher: So, go to the board!

Pupils [shouting out]: Me, senorita.

Teacher: Go Nubia, and write below!

[Nubia goes to the board and writes under the umbrellas in the drawing "a set of umbrellas." Nubia reads out what she has written.]

Teacher [to the pupils]: Very well. Read out what she wrote on the board, slowly, without running.

Teacher: Very good. So what do we have there?

Pupils [together]: A set of four umbrellas.

Teacher: Let's see your highness [she walks toward a student at the back of the room]. Will you give me an example? Whatever you highness wants.

Boy: House.

Teacher: But how many little houses? Let's see!

Boy: Fi. . .ve.

Teacher: A set of five. . .

Pupils [together]: Houses.

Teacher [addressing another boy]: Give me an example of another set, your highness.

Boy: Two medicine chests.

Teacher: All right, two medicine chests; and you your highness?

Another boy: Four oranges.

Teacher: Four oranges.

Another boy: Six bananas.

Teacher: A set of six bananas; very good! Let's see?

Another boy: Eight dancers.

Girl: A set of five apples.

[As the children call out the examples, the teacher repeats them.]

Teacher [pointing to a boy at the back]: You, there, your highness!

Pupil: Four trees.

Note taking

Teacher: Now, take out your exercise books!

Boy [at the back]: Maths?

Teacher: The maths one. Yes, sir!

[The children take out their exercise books.]

Girl: The clean one?

[As opposed to one used for rough calculations.]

Teacher: Yes, the clean one.

Boy: Senora Elvia, do we begin on a new page?

Teacher: I'm going over right now to see what you are doing.

[The children are making a noise; the teacher returns the pens she had collected earlier.]

Girl [referring to her neighbour]: Senora Elvia, she did not get her pen back.

[The teacher ignores the observation.]

Teacher: In the exercise book with clean lines, skip four lines, four . . .

[The teacher moves around the rows and shows as an example the exercise book of a boy in the first row.]

Teacher: If you have little space left, then go on to another page!

Review of main theme

Teacher: So as we said before, there are several kinds of . . . what?

Pupils [together]: Of sets.

Teacher: Of sets. How does one make up a set?

Pupils [together]: Units.

Teacher: U . . . ?

Pupils [finishing the word]: . . . nits.
Teacher: So here, by how many elements is it represented?
Some pupils: By three.
Other pupils: Four.
One pupil: One.
Teacher: Which is the unitary set?
Pupil: A unit.
Teacher: The one which is represented by only one?
Pupils [together]: Unit.
Teacher: What then is the name of that set?
Boy: Homogeneous.
Pupils [together]: Homogeneous.
Teacher: Homogeneous. And the other?
Pupils [together]: And the other?
Teacher: The homogeneous one is the one which is made of several elements belonging to the same species.
Girl: Eight flowers.
Teacher: For example, eight . . .
Pupils [together]: Eight flowers.
Teacher: They all belong to the same species because they are all flowers, no?
Teacher: Another set?
Boy: Seven erasers.
Teacher [talking to another boy]: Let's see, your highness.
Boy: Nine pencils.
Teacher: Nine pencils.
Pupils [together]: Five pictures.
Teacher: Five pictures. So that set of five pictures, all the set belong to the same?
Pupils [together]: Species.
Teacher: Species. And because they belong to the same species, what is the set called?
[Pupils are saying something but it is difficult to hear what.]
Teacher: Homo . . . ?
Pupils [together]: . . . geneous.
Teacher: Homogeneous. So a homogeneous set is one made up of elements belonging to the same?
Pupils [together]: Species.
[The teacher writes on the board turning her back to the students.]
Teacher: So, write as a heading. . . .
[Some children read out what the teacher writes.]
Teacher: Read what is here. Slowly, all will . . . there, those children who are writing!
Pupils [read out together]: Heterogeneous set!

The Analysis

Borrowing from traditional structural analysis, we began by examining the notes of all the lessons observed to discover their developmental stages and the degree to which these stages related coherently to a central theme. We did not expect, however, such coherence to mean the treatment of one single set of contents; i.e., a geography lesson might well include notions of physics or a language lesson might permissibly refer to mathematical concepts.

The thematic unit

In examining the transcribed lesson, it is not difficult to find its theme. The questioning about homework referred to numbers. The lesson development was about set theory, beginning with a reference to units, something with which the children appeared to be familiar. From there on, the teacher moved to the concept of "homogeneous" and "heterogeneous" sets as laid out in the syllabus and the teacher's guide. Her instructions to write in the exercise book referred to the types of sets she had been talking about, as did the review at the end of the lesson. In spite of some linguistic inaccuracies (she referred indiscriminately to units and to set elements), the children did not seem to be confused judging from their ability to provide appropriate examples.

The structure of the lesson, which clearly follows the literary stages of "introduction," "development," and "conclusion," was also observed in other lessons. In a 5th-year class, we found, for example, the following stages: preliminaries (handing out books, collecting money), development of main theme, and assignment of homework. There also was thematic coherence in this lesson that centred around the topic of bones. The lesson's only departure from the theme occurred at the end when a completely different content (a language task) was used to assign homework.

The situation, however, was much less clear in another observed lesson (described fully in de Tezanos *et al.* 1983). This was a 1st-year class and the lesson had already begun when the observer entered the room. At that moment, the following sequence of events was witnessed: a drill exercise during which the children repeated the names of the fingers; development of the main topic on uses of the fingers; a review of what had just been taught; further development relating to other parts of the human body; an invitation to play a game; game; introduction of a new topic (sun, sky, moon, and night).

Although during the first part of the lesson there was a central theme, after playing the game (introduced presumably because the children appeared to be tired), the topic was abandoned and a new one was introduced. The second topic was also not completed. Thus, it was possible to see three minilessons within this one lesson. In the first minilesson, the introduction, development, and conclusion segments were kept, as was thematic unity. The second minilesson, which continued the development about other parts of the body, was much more disorganized, even with distortions in content. It was followed by the game intermission and the third minilesson, which had no introduction or conclusion.

Another form of lesson organization was found in a 5th-year class, where the main topic development served to introduce a new theme. The teacher began this lesson by checking homework and then used a song to motivate the children to enter into the central topic.

> *Teacher:* That song helped you to warm up a bit; what did you do besides singing?
> *Pupils:* Movements!
> *Teacher:* What did you use in order to do those movements?
> *Pupils* [responding indistinctly]: Our head, body, limbs.

After this dialogue, the teacher was able relevantly to say "What bones are we going to consider today?" It was apparent, however, that the topic was not entirely new to the children as the teacher was able to carry out a questioning sequence without encountering response difficulties. The lesson kept its unity and structure until the stage where children were asked to write in their exercise books. Then an interruption and summons to leave the room prompted a change of activity.

> *Teacher:* Wait a minute! I will give you some work. Better, some language work!

The anatomy class had suddenly been transformed into a language lesson.

> *Teacher* [writing on the board]: Use these words and relate them to each other in order to make up a short story!
> *Teacher* [as she wrote the word "country"]: As most of you live in the country, it should be easy.
> *Teacher* [continuing to write]: Country, animals, river, small house, grandfather, children, trees, blue sky, landscape.

In another lesson, a group of 3rd-year children were working on fractions. Here, girls and boys were more evenly distributed than in the other classes. The structure of the lesson included the motivation activity of a cucumber being shown to the class, while the children were told that this cucumber had to divided by a thrifty housewife: "three parts for today, and the fourth we keep for tomorrow."

The development of the main theme in this class was introduced with the question "if one doesn't use a whole unit, what do we call its parts?" After this, the concept of proper and improper fractions was developed, followed by a session of practice at the board with children being called to write various types of fractions.

> *Teacher:* Raul, come to the board!
> [Raul walks to the board and cleans it.]
> *Teacher:* Let's see, Silvia, give him a proper fraction!
> *Silvia:* Four-fourths!
> *Teacher:* Proper! Marina?
> *Marina:* Three-fifths!
> *Teacher:* Into how many parts does the unit have to be divided, Raul?
> *Pupils* [raising their hands and calling out]: Me, teacher!
> *Teacher* [to Raul who has not been able to answer]: Sit down!
> *Another pupil* [comes to the board and answers]: Five parts.
> [The sound of a bell calling teachers to a meeting signals the end of the lesson and the teacher hastens to assign a piece of homework].

Finally, we look at a 1st-year lesson centred on a copying exercise. Its parts included some preliminary remarks on the task to be performed by the children and an announcement that while they were doing their copying, the teacher would be marking. During the lesson, the children copied a text from their reader. After completion of this task, the teacher walked around looking at and correcting what had been done, while requesting some pupils to read aloud what they had written. Just before going out to play, the children were asked to perform arm exercises.

An initial reading of the notes of this 1st-year lesson seemed to indicate that the teacher's main concern was to get on with her marking. After looking at our notes more attentively, however, not only could we detect a lesson structure, but it seemed that the teacher had given her marking activity a teaching purpose.

> *Teacher* [to the pupils]: Why a copy exercise? Because last month we were not very good in our reading and writing. If something is supposed to be spelled with a "b" then you should not use a "v" just because you like that letter better.
> [In spoken Spanish, "v" and "b" are easily confused.]

In general, most of the lessons we observed conformed to what might be found in traditional pedagogical texts inspired by Herbartian didactics. It is doubtful, however, that teachers were consciously aware of the theoretical justification for their lesson styles; therefore, their teaching style was presumably due to experience.

Teacher–pupil interactions

The second perspective used to examine the lesson scripts centred on the questioning process, seeing it both as an indicator of pupil participation during a lesson and as a mediator for the appropriation of knowledge.

We first considered the teacher's questions, of which the following sequence was typical.

> *Teacher* [to the class]: What is the number?
> *Pupils* [together]: One hundred!
> *Teacher:* Ten units, isn't it?
> *Pupils:* Yes.
> *Teacher:* If we add another hundred, what do we have?
> *Pupils* [together]: Two hundred!
> *Teacher* [pointing to another boy]: So come over here, your highness, and write two hundred!
> *Teacher* [while the boy writes on the board]: Plus another hundred units!
> *Pupils* [together]: Three hundred!
> *Teacher* [saying in a hurried tone to the boy at the board]: Three hundred and if we add another hundred units!
> *Pupils* [together]: Four hundred!
> *Teacher* [to another boy]: Tell me, your highness . . . plus?
> *Pupils* [together]: Five hundred!
> *Pupils:* Going up?
> *Teacher:* That's right! Plus another hundred?
> *Pupils* [together]: Six hundred!
> *Teacher:* Write six hundred, your highness, let's see.
> [Pupils begin murmuring.]
> *Teacher:* The number on top of the others!
> *Teacher:* Plus another hundred?
> *Pupils* [together]: Seven hundred!
> *Teacher:* And if we add another hundred?
> *Pupils* [together]: Eight hundred!
> *Teacher:* So, with what number did we begin?
> *Pupils* [together]: With one hundred!
> *Teacher:* Plus one hundred?
> *Pupils* [together]: Two hundred!
> *Teacher:* Plus one hundred?
> *Pupils* [together]: Three hundred!
> *Teacher:* Plus one hundred?

Pupils [together]: Four hundred!
[Teacher continues in this way until she reaches eight hundred.]
Teacher: And if we take away one hundred from the eight hundred. What do we have left?
Pupils [together]: Seven hundred!
Teacher: And if we take away one hundred?
Pupils [together]: Six hundred!
Teacher: Minus another hundred?
Pupils [together]: Five hundred!
[Teacher goes on this way until she reaches one hundred.]
Teacher: Minus one hundred?
Pupils [together]: Zero!
Teacher: Zero . . . no? Very good!

This whole questioning sequence, which lasted about 10 minutes, was part of the second segment of a lesson and was centred on correcting homework. The questioning style was iterative because the same question was asked again and again: "plus" or "minus" 100. There was no teaching dialogue that might have involved the filling of gaps or the allowance for student ideas.

The following sequence belonged to the third part or main development of the same lesson.

Teacher: We here, this girl, this doll in maths, what does she represent?
Pupils [together]: An element!
Teacher: An element. A what?
Pupils [together]: A unit!
Teacher: And why is there only one unit?
Pupils [together]: Because there is one element!
Teacher: Because there only is one?
Pupils [together]: Element!
Teacher: And there is only one?
Pupils [together]: Element. Only one object!
Teacher: No! Is it an object? Is a person an object?
Pupils [together]: No, only one unit!
Teacher: Only one small picture, no?
Pupils [together]: Only one doll!
Teacher: Yes! There is only one doll, so what does the doll represent?
Pupils [together]: An element!
Teacher: Let's see Carlos, what does this picture represent?
Carlos: An element!
Teacher [with acceptance tone]: An element! Say it in another way!
[The children appear doubtful.]
Pupils [together]: A set.
Teacher: A what? A what?
Pupils [with some fear]: A unit?
Teacher: So here there is a unit because there only is one object.

This mode of questioning was no longer of an iterative kind. The teacher had engaged in a sort of Socratic pursuit of knowledge. When the nature of the questions is considered, however, it is not difficult to see how the Socratic purpose is violated: "is it an object?"; "can a person be an object?"; "only one small drawing, no?"; "yes, there is only one doll, so what does the doll represent?" What is the reference point of this sequence of questions? Is it an object, a person, a picture, or a doll? If the purpose underlying Socratic dialogue is to clarify and signify through means of remembrance and effort, then this sort of dialogue is really a distortion or trivialization of Socratic method.

The style of the children's questions was no different from that of the teacher.

Pupil: What shall we write?
Pupil [showing his exercise book]: This way senora Elvira?
Pupil: How many lines?
Pupils: Should we skip a line?

It was very difficult to find in any of our observation notes pupil questions that were different from these. Questions were almost always about formal aspects of the tasks they were asked to perform or about classroom behaviour norms. There were never any questions that related to the main topics of the lesson or to their learning activities. In this way, neither the teachers' nor the pupils' style of questioning could be taken as an indication of meaningful participation in the learning process. The teachers rarely asked "why" questions and the pupils never inquired about the contents of their lessons.[2]

The type of responses given by the children differed depending on whether they were within an iterative context or faced with some sort of trivialized Socratic dialogue. In the first case, responses were specific and generally one or two words; e.g., "three hundred," "four hundred." In the second case, responses sometimes could be diversified to include several responses in one: "exercise books," "units," "three times, four, one."

How did teachers deal with pupil responses? On the whole, teachers would acknowledge the words they considered to be appropriate. We emphasize that this acknowledgment was only to the words; hardly any attention was ever given to the conceptual meaning being conveyed. Also, the teachers hardly ever stopped to clarify or to explain why other words were not acceptable.

Teacher: I have five what?
Pupils [together]: Elements.
Teacher: No, what is this?
Pupils [together]: Pens.
Teacher: Pens, what do we do with pens?
Pupils: We use them to write.
Teacher: To write, yes! So, with regard to sets what do I have?
Pupils [together]: A set.
Teacher: A group of what?
Pupils: Elements.
Pupils: Pens.
Teacher: A group of what?
Pupils [together]: Of several elements?
Teacher: Very good!

No explanation is given in this sequence about why the word "pens" is acceptable in one context and "elements" is acceptable in another. No room exists in this sort of questioning for an indication of reflectiveness; responses are part of a guessing process in which the child engages every time he or she is called to answer a question.

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[2] A total of 60 sets of extended notes were analyzed. None included the question "why" coming from the pupils (see de Tezanos et al. 1983).

Another type of dialogue we encountered in classrooms centred around instructions given individually or collectively about the formal aspects of their work.

> *Teacher:* Please draw a margin in those exercise books that don't already have one. To draw a margin, how many little squares should you leave?
> *Pupils* [together]: Four!
> *Teacher:* Write with large handwriting. Please write with big letters because it is a heading, and headings, you must not forget, should have bigger letters in order to show the difference between the heading and the rest of what you have.
> *Teacher* [to a boy]: Here there are letters that are long downwards and others long upwards; do it this way as all letters are not the same. Can you see the letters?
> *Pupils:* Yes, madam!
> *Teacher:* You must write the letters of the word closer together. Can't you see how they have been written on the board? Why don't you imitate what's on the board? Now leave the other line and underline it, so that we can show a very elegant heading.
> *Teacher:* Did you finish counting the lines?
> *Pupils* [together]: Yes, madam!
> *Teacher:* Now you will write with blue. Nice handwriting, slow, don't run. You must do letters not hooks.

Summary

Up to now, we have attempted to describe the classrooms observed in terms of lesson structure and participation modes. That is, as pointed out initially, we have tried to translate classroom reality to the reader. However, it is crucial to understand the significance of the events described. This need to interpret what we have seen has made us relate our observations to questions about schooling, teaching, and the contents of teaching and learning.

Classroom occurrences are, in reality, the most significant of school activities. It is in the classroom that the traditional role of the school is carried out, i.e., where the transmission of knowledge and accepted social practices takes place. From our observations, we can provisionally say that school activities centre around the transmission of knowledge. All that teachers are concerned about is to teach something they consider to be useful and valuable for their children. To do this, teachers generate situations that, on the whole, reproduce what they experienced as pupils: i.e., a teacher who scrutinizes the memories of a group of children to find words that are considered appropriate to making them "good citizens of the future." In this way, it is justifiable to assert that teachers in Colombian schools do apply some of the "substantive contents" of pedagogical tradition, but they do so unconsciously, without having really learned about them through their training curriculum.

If one looks at the deeper meaning of the pedagogical tradition as synthesized by Lombardo-Radice (1933), when he suggests that a lesson does not consist of the objects we present but of the concepts the child already has and transforms as he looks at them (a concept needs to be affirmed, made precise, and deepened, i.e., transformed, so as to solve an inner question), then we must say that the teachers' endeavours are mere formalism; their sole concern appears to be to show something, to question, and to respond, repeating this model ad infinitum, without much concern about what is being taught.

The characteristic structure of this teaching pattern also points to the impact of the "behavioural objectives" instructional model implemented by the teachers, consciously or not, as a result of their training and the format of the official curriculum. This model emphasizes the hierarchical organization of information, relating it to a set of preestablished objectives expressed in observable and quantifiable behaviours that are supposed to indicate whether pupils have learned what has been taught. The stimulus-response pattern is at the heart of this model, with its emphasis on proper procedures for the transmission of information. Within this perspective, the school, as the material frame for classroom activities, finds its purpose in efficiently administering the process of information transmission by seeking an improved time-work ratio from pupils and teachers.

The Interpretation

The suspicion that we have not yet conveyed the whole meaning of what we observed and that, therefore, the deeper roots of school failure have not been discovered led us to attempt a second stage of interpretation (for its theoretical justification, see Appendix 1).

Thus, we reread our observation notes and singled out recurring events that appeared to have some special significance for the understanding of the teaching process. These we called "key incidents." Proceeding further, we grouped these key incidents according to their nature. We called these groups "significant moments," i.e., processes that characterize the pattern of social relationships in the classroom (see Appendix 1).

The most important significant moments related to the teaching processes are those we have called irony, intermittent deafness, repetitive nominalism, arbitrary responses to teacher questions, and gymnastics as a mode of discipline. In the following sections, we include excerpts that illustrate what is meant by each of these groups.

Irony and intermittent deafness

1st year

Pupil: To eat them!
Teacher [with tone of irony]: Is that something to eat? Do you eat them? Maybe that's why your's are so small!
[The other children laugh.]

3rd year

Teacher [with tone of irony]: Good, let me congratulate you on not bringing your homework!

5th year

Teacher [to a child who is coughing]: Now everyone has a coughing spell!
Teacher: Flat! Very good! Are there other bones that are not flat?

Pupil: Curved ones!
[The teacher ignores the answer.]
Teacher: The what?
Pupil [together]: Maxilars!
Teacher: One what?
Pupils [together]: Nasal . . . .
[The teacher ignores the answer.]

In all these cases, the common element was that when faced with the teacher's ironic tone or comment, the children became silent and fear was reflected in their faces. To us, it seemed that these situations were evidence of an attempt at drawing children into submission. Often, it was the lack of knowledge and yet the need to maintain a knowledgeable appearance that induced teachers to adopt such a form of symbolic violence. The pupil who answered the teacher's question by saying "to eat them" was referring to her hands. Although her teacher had previously tolerated a whole array of erroneous answers regarding the use of fingers, in this case she used irony to reject the pupil's answer. However, her next sentence to the class was itself grammatically incorrect: "now, throw us that little story about fingers." Thus, this teacher did not even exhibit the intellectual authority to justify her rejection of the response.

Ignoring pupils' responses was a commonly observed event. It took place within very different contexts: an erroneous answer that was not noticed, unconcern about having mistaken the identity of a pupil, or no response to questions about formalities of the work assigned. To us, this attitude expressed yet another arbitrary mode of bringing children into submission. The teacher listened or responded only when he or she chose to do so. Conceivably, many children would experience this as a mode of rejection and the child who needed attention would then resort only to responses the teacher might like.

Repetitive nominalism

Teacher: Into how many parts was it cut?
Pupil: Four!
Teacher: Four.

As may be noted from earlier excerpts in this chapter, repetition of words was common. Moreover, it was difficult for us to find anywhere in our field notes an expression of the intent to convey meaning to what was being repeated. We are not denying the need to commit facts to memory; the names of bones, for example, may have to be memorized. However, the educational use of memory must include links to imagination and creativity, the basis for cultural transformation. Seen this way, memory relies on the capacity to internalize meanings; only then does it contribute to the progress of knowledge. The concept of memory underlying the practices we witnessed was one centred on repetition, with meaning being imposed externally instead of being internally constructed. Its only purpose was the senseless reproduction of words. The repetition of the word "four" in the example probably did nothing to help the child understand the concept of a fraction, as was intended; however, a picture the teacher later drew on the board of an object to be divided probably did so (Piaget and Inhelder 1967).

Arbitrary responses

1st year

Teacher: And if I say that all the children in this class are a set. Who are the elements?

Pupils [together and referring to a previous example]: The apples.

3rd year

Teacher: Yesterday, I told you about sobriety.

Pupil: Sobriety is when one eats too much!

5th year

Teacher: What else? Let's see! Which are they, those that make the nose? Also, there are times when you have a cold and when you go to bed at night you cannot sleep because they are blocked . . . and you talk hoarsely. What are those two called? You there [pointing to the back of the room]. You . . . can you hear? At home, when they become inflamed, there . . .

Pupils: Nose drops!

Teacher: No, that's what you use when you want the inflammation to go down. But when you have a cold and go to bed, you can't sleep because your . . . are blocked? What? Let's see?

Pupil: The bronchi.

These responses appear to denote the children's need to say something, to take part in what happens in the classroom. The children do not think when they cry out their answers; all they want is to indicate that "yes" they also "know," they also "understand" what is going on or what is being discussed. Yet, one might question whether such responses are really arbitrary. In fact, most responses follow the children's logic and their understanding of what is happening. In the examples, the reference to nose drops relates to their interpretation of a question about having a cold and not being able to sleep. The child who answers "apples" in the question about elements does so because of a sudden change of context in the question and the lack of any significant cue to the change. There are also cases where it is the arbitrariness of a question that leads to an arbitrary response.

Looking at these situations more globally, one might say that, in fact, there are two linguistic codes in operation: one that is built on commonsense knowledge (even folklore) and another that is built on subject-matter contents. These codes are constantly intermingled, so that teachers ask questions from the commonsense code of daily experience, while requiring their pupils to respond within the scientific code.[3]

Exercises as a form of discipline

1st year

[The class is noisy.]

Teacher: Let's put the pencil down. Put your hands up, like this [the teacher facing the class throws her hands up]. Stand up!

[The pupils wave their fingers as they raise their arms.]

Pupil: My hands are not tired!

Teacher: I asked you to leave your pencils, to stand up and to imitate my movements!

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[3] Further development of this concept is being prepared for publication.

[The children perform the exercises the way the teacher does.]

Teacher: Let's clap and hear the noise that our fingers make. The right hand first, then the left one. Let's sit, stand. Arms up, lower the left arm and with the right one make a circle, round and round. Now the other way, without making a noise, Diego. Now your hands are rested and so are you also. Let's go back to work!

[The children sit and start working again.]

3rd year

[Boys and girls in separate lines walk to the door for recreation. The teacher stands before them.]

Teacher: Arm exercises to a count of ten!

[The teacher counts and the children touch different parts of their body (head, shoulders).]

Teacher: Again! All in time! There are still some boys who are not paying attention!

[The children repeat the exercise.]

Teacher: Please, now, all should leave in complete order. You know how you should behave during recreation. Hands at your backs! Girls, follow!

We often found situations such as these as children returned from play, began their day, or during their desk work. These sudden, unpredictable gymnastic exercises disrupt the children's activities and their purpose cannot be understood as traditional, i.e., the healthy physical development of pupils. Furthermore, their irrational character is apparent if one considers that physical education has a specific slot in the timetable. These gymnastic exercises actually suggest themselves as images of discipline and order in the classroom and seem to mediate the teacher's authority.

Conclusions

In an effort to give meaning to the constitutive elements of the "styles of teaching," the first fact to consider is that they do not belong to the substantive contents of pedagogical tradition. This forces us to search for an explanation that will enlarge the understanding of the teacher–pupil relationships within Colombian schools. The explanation is built upon the following question: Why do these elements emerge?

The first attempt to answer this question is based on the assumption that the image of the Colombian teacher contains, in itself, a contradiction. The terms of the contradiction go from "to represent the embodiment of knowledge" on the one side to a "negligible social support for the teaching role" on the other. Having to perform within the parameters of this contradictory image, a teacher's daily activity consists of searching for behavioural norms that reaffirm the first term of the contradiction; therefore, irony becomes a mode of exercising authority by suppressing a possible follow up to the teacher's discourse.

What we have called "intermittent deafness" might, however, be linked to another condition. A plausible explanation could be the difficulty that teachers have of attending to simultaneous and different answers given by 30 to 40 children, this being one reason teachers sometimes insist on individual responses. It would also seem that teachers have a compulsive need to keep within the lesson topic they have set and, so, perhaps unconsciously, select only those responses or possible questions that do not disrupt their discourse. Their intermittent deafness is also linked to the way in which teachers handle their pupils' arbitrary responses. Teachers seem unable to channel incorrect responses and so do not stimulate reflection about the errors made by children. This is partly an indication of the superficial knowledge that teachers appear to have of their subject and of the pedagogical know-how that mediates the transmission of knowledge. Thus, teachers become simply informants of results without knowing how these results came to be; hence, their use of repetitive nominalism, which ignores the relationship between things and words and forgets that words "of themselves do not confer either knowledge or feelings [and that] things of themselves do not produce either understanding of intimacy in relationships. Both words and things have to come together in teaching if there is to be education" (Stoecker 1964).

Lack of knowledge about the relationship between words and things underlies the evaluation procedures used by teachers that seem to centre on the number of words a child is able to repeat. Words, in turn, have to be learned in an atmosphere of "discipline," "order," and "attention"; to this end, the teacher invokes the power of gymnastic movements, where what counts is not the intrinsic purpose of the exercise but its disciplinary potential. This style of teaching, which we found in every classroom, seems indicative of the teachers' understanding of what it is to teach.

If one considers the propositions of traditional pedagogy as expressed by Kerschensteiner (see Stoecker 1964), "teaching consists of a coherent and systematically constructed introduction to cultural meaning structures," then there was no genuine teaching in the classrooms observed.

One of the main functions of schools is to stimulate students to become cultivated human beings, i.e., subjects who achieve a Socratic "know thyself," which is historically rooted both in their own individuality and in their participation in social processes (Gramsci 1970). To accomplish such a purpose, teachers need to see teaching as involving knowledge of broad and coherent fields that is appropriated from the perspective of their modes of construction and not from their results (Stoecker 1964); otherwise, the school loses both its formative purpose and its social anchorage. The school's formative purpose recognizes that knowledge of any sort is not just a set of contents about which information is conveyed, but that it has the power of changing the knowing subjects in ways that enhance or diminish their human quality. Social anchorage refers to the commonsense knowledge already held by a child and the mode in which it can be related to the appropriation of legitimate scientific knowledge. We should also add that such scientific knowledge is historically produced according to societal needs and, in turn, produces results that affect society.

Thus, as a teacher prepares and develops a lesson, he or she should clearly consider the following conditions:

- The children's commonsense knowledge;
- The modes of cultural appropriation of reality that children have already achieved;
- The children's concrete situation;
- Basic pedagogical structures (didactic elements);

- Elemental contents of the subjects; and
- The formative value of such contents.

It is difficult for a teacher who is confused about modes of appropriating knowledge to handle the children's commonsense knowledge. Such a confusion may also inhibit the teacher from relating teaching to "concrete situations," as counseled by didactics. "Concrete situations" should not be taken, as they often are, to be materials or educational aids: concrete situations refer to the knowledge the child already has about reality. A teacher will be able to contextualize socially his or her pedagogical activities if knowledge of the children's concrete situation can be linked to their developmental stages of appropriation of knowledge. To do this, a teacher needs to add effective knowledge about the contents of subjects being taught. This is the only way that a teacher can really understand the formative value that subject knowledge has for the development of an individual human being who is historically conscious of self and society.

Thus, to view the meaning of school failure solely as failure to complete the school year or to remain in school beyond that year is inaccurate. If all that a child has learned has been to repeat and to equate knowledge with successful memorization, then another kind of failure may be present even when success is accepted. We challenge this view of a child's passage through school and, therefore, question the kinds of successes and failures that are produced in Colombian primary schools.

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5

Schools and Teaching in Venezuela

Irma Hernandez

In this chapter, we explore the relationship between characteristics of different types of school structures and the particular way in which the process of education takes place within their confines. The schools that were included in the Venezuelan study are, in a way, the product of different stages in Venezuelan educational development and they reflect the educational philosophies of competing governments as one has replaced another in the last 50 years.

In the urban and suburban areas of the capital city of Caracas, we worked in three primary schools: urban basic, creative basic, and urban conventional. In the rural zone around Turmero in the State of Aragua, we observed two primary schools: rural conventional and rural basic. Our observations included the 1st and 4th years in each school.

The main distinctions between these schools relate to their structure and their degree of advancement into the reformed system implemented in Venezuela in the early 1970s. Thus, the schools that we have labeled "basic" are those that will become 9-year primary schools caring for children between 6 and 15 years of age in a terminal phase that, throughout Latin America, is the basic level of education. As defined by the Venezuelan Ministry of Education's by-laws, basic schools are institutions where

> a minimal compulsory education is provided for all citizens with the purpose of contributing to a well-rounded development of the personality, preparing them to value our historical heritage and to take part constructively in the community by means of those instruments that make for effective work or for a successful pursuit of further education.

Basic schools have three cycles: the "instrumental" cycle covers the 1st to 4th year of school; the "consolidated" cycle extends through the 5th and 6th years; and the "independence" cycle covers the 7th to 9th years. Our observations were held only in the instrumental cycle, where curricular contents are centred on literacy and numeracy skills, and, thus, are the same as those in conventional schools.

The two conventional schools in the study belong to the group that remains within the tradition of the 6-year structure. In addition to this conventional–basic distinction, we found that two of the basic schools also differed from each other. The creative basic school was part of a national experiment designed to encourage the development of critical attitudes and free-expression activities of a cognitive, emotional, and physical nature (Ministerio de Educación 1981). The rural basic school, although conforming to the principles of basic education, had a history of its own as a "community" school.[1] One of the oldest among the schools we observed, it had gone through several structural phases. From its initial status in 1946 as a one-teacher school, by 1950, it had become an *escuela concentrada*, amalgamating several of the one-teacher institutions within the same locality. In 1961, together with a proper school building, this school received full status as a primary school and became a pilot centre for an experiment in vocational training related to local and regional development. This project also involved a transformation of the rural basic school into a productive school, where the crops planted by the students were to be used partly for maintenance and learning materials for the school and partly as personal savings for the pupils themselves. Thus, education consisted of a formal program provided in the first 3 years and geared toward acquiring literacy and numeracy skills, and vocational training in agriculture, metal, wood, construction, and electrical activities or in home-related tasks especially designed for the girls. Children were to participate actively in the planning of the various activities and these activities were to relate to the needs of the community. Today, this school, although retaining its specificity as a community school, is moving toward the 9-year structure of basic education.

In this chapter, we describe these schools and their routines; we then describe the teachers, the children, and their environment. Finally, we consider descriptively and interpretatively the characteristics of the teaching styles observed in the classrooms and the way in which these styles could relate to the construction of notions of success and failure by the children.

The Schools and their Routines

Physically, all schools functioned in buildings especially designed for schooling; in each case, however, their features reflected the period in which they were built and the state of expansion of the educational system at that time. Two of the buildings, the rural basic and urban conventional schools, had been erected when the drive for quantitative expansion had not reached its peak (1940–1965) and the primary concern of the prevailing educational philosophy was the child as the centre of the educational process. These schools, with one- and two-storey buildings, respectively, had spacious playgrounds, enough classroom and laboratory space, and a library; they had ample corridors for the children to move in and plenty of light and fresh air.

The other two urban schools (basic and creative), although built with enough room for teaching and administration, had much less space for moving around and for games, sports, and other such activities. They had been built during the period of reform (1973–1975), when official policies emphasized the need to expand the system and provide educational services for everyone who required them.

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[1] The legal basis for this type of structure is found in the Ley Orgánica de Educación, 28 June 1980, and the Sixth National Development Plan (1981–1985). Both of these documents emphasize the civic and social purpose of education and its role as a "means toward the improvement of community life and a primordial factor in national development." They set out a legal structure called Comunidad Educativa, which is the association of teachers, parents, students, and community members in the running of the school.

The rural conventional school, built in 1967, was housed in the typical, prefabricated, light building that had been designed to replace the old country houses used by most rural schools for their activities.

The general atmosphere we observed in these schools was, in part, a function of their different physical facilities. The spacious schools enabled pupils to congregate more easily at the centre of the playground; thus, they were more communicative and sociable and more prone to interact with different age groups. By contrast, we found a cliquish type of group structure in the less spacious, tiered-built type of school and more cases of misbehaviour during breaks.

On the whole, the schools were adequately supplied in terms of furniture (tables for the 1st years, desks for the 4th years), green chalkboards, storage space, cupboards, and display areas. Being located in rundown neighbourhoods, the quality of construction of the urban schools contrasted sharply with the rest of the houses in the area, a fact that had become a cause for resentment among the community members.

The classrooms

The two schools operating with the conventional structure hardly differed in the layout of their 1st- and 4th-year classrooms. First-year children in the urban school sat at tables in a cozy classroom and enjoyed a "home-corner," a "toys-corner," and a colourful display board, and the rural children shared desks and tables in a room that also had bright-coloured displays. The 4th-year urban and rural classrooms were arranged in the traditional form of rows and desks and had display areas on the walls. In all classrooms, the teacher's desk was situated in front, toward one side of the room, depending on where the door was located. The teacher was thus visible, although not as obviously as would have been the case had there been a platform for the desk.

The classroom in all three basic schools observed were very similar to those found in conventional schools: tables for the smaller children and desks for the 4th-year children. Most of the rooms had equally attractive display areas and plenty of bookshelves.

Daily routines

Most of the school buildings housed two separate schools (with different populations), which functioned in a morning shift from 0700 to 1200 and an afternoon shift from 1300 to 1800 . After hearing the bell, children in the urban school rushed to form lines segregated by sex and year. In some schools, singing of the Venezuelan national anthem was followed with a flag-raising ceremony. Patterns in the rural school were somewhat different. In the rural basic school, for example, the children arrived around 0700 and slowly organized themselves to perform various duties lasting about 20 minutes. When finished with these tasks, they were called by a teacher to sing the national anthem; they then heard a talk on some theme and various announcements. The other rural school allowed children to walk directly into the classrooms without lining up, at the request of the earliest arrived teacher. We noticed that teachers in this school were often anywhere from 5 minutes to 1 hour late, alleging "distance" and "transportation" problems.

The time allocated to breaks was 30 minutes in all schools but one. Normally, as soon as the bell rang, children ran out to the playground. In the urban schools, there was a canteen where the children could buy a drink and an *arepa* (a sort of Cornish pasty with cheese or meat); the rural children normally brought their own midmorning snacks. Breaks in the morning were usually from 0900 to 0930. Only the rural basic school allowed 10-minute breaks every 90-minute teaching period. The teachers took turns supervising the playground, mostly concentrating their efforts on stopping fights among the children.

The end-of-day bell rang in most schools from 15 to 30 minutes before the prescribed leaving time. In two of the schools with a morning shift (rural basic and urban conventional), children were taken to lunch, but only in the rural basic school did all children actually have lunch. In the urban school, the children known to be physically feeble or very poor received a free lunch.

The Teachers

All the teachers we encountered, except for those in the rural conventional school, had been trained in Normal School (teacher-training college).

The 1st-year teacher in the urban conventional school acknowledged in an interview that she had chosen to become a teacher because of pressure from her mother. She seemed interested in and concerned about her work, however, and her students appeared to like her. She was 37 years old and had been teaching at the same level for 5 years. The 4th-year teacher, however, was no longer satisfied with her profession. She had elected to be a teacher and sought improvement through taking a number of in-service courses; but, after 23 years on the job, 6 of those at the same year level, she told us "I like my work, but I'm tired." Despite this assertion, her pupils had good words for her: "she is good, she dresses nicely, and gives good explanations. She's *chevere* [a good sport], she cares for us, and explains what she writes on the board."

The teachers in the rural conventional school were both younger and each had received a different type of training. The 1st-year teacher, who was 30 years old, had finished her secondary school only 3 years earlier; she then spent 1 year at a local training institution to obtain her teaching certificate. At the time of our observations, she was enrolled in the university as a student of English (a course leading to a secondary teaching certificate). She came from a poor family and had achieved her present educational status by attending night school. As she talked to us about her educational views, we could sense some insecurity. This was reflected in the need to respond with "set" phrases reflecting the recommended views about education, which, presumably, she had learned during her training. The 4th-year teacher was 25 years old, had finished her secondary schooling 2 years before we met her, and, at the time, was enrolled in a teacher-training course. She was definitely unhappy about being a teacher. "I like to teach, but I wish

I could have prepared for another profession; this one offers very little pay. A teacher, by vocation, I definitely am not!"

In general, teachers in both these conventional schools seemed to operate on the basis of a philosophy of teaching that saw their position as being somewhat messianic, i.e., as providers of enlightenment for the children: "I selected this profession because I felt I had a vocation for it and a desire to act as an apostle by doing good." This very philosophy, however, appeared to foster receptive and passive attitudes in the children, a result of rather authoritarian modes of interaction.

> *Teacher:* You have done something you never did before! All of you stood up without permission to sharpen your pencils!
>
> [Another occasion]
> *Teacher:* Don't write in your book!
> *Teacher:* May, what sort of position is that? You should sit straight.
> [A pupil raises his hand to call the teacher.]
> *Teacher:* I'm going through the rows. Just wait until I have finished correcting and can return over there.
>
> [Another occasion]
> *Teacher:* You are an intelligent boy, polite, quiet; but you behave badly and that cannot be accepted; your shirt is very torn, you must sew it. Tell your grandma to come to the school tomorrow!

The teachers in the three basic schools we observed had all been trained in Normal Schools and had taken at least one other in-service course. Two of them had enrolled in university courses leading to a degree in education. Their years of experience varied from 12 to 22 years.

In the urban basic school, the 1st-year teacher we interviewed confessed to not being terribly happy with her profession.

> I don't consider myself to be a good teacher. I think I should be better. I chose this profession but as time goes by it is as if one were losing one's vocation; or I don't know if it is because one does not see the same kind of results that we had as young teachers. I have 22 years of experience.

In spite of this assertion, this teacher was kind and encouraging toward the children in her classroom and sought to involve them actively in the lessons. The 4th-year teacher, on the contrary, although describing herself as satisfied with her work and as "demanding" with the children, showed, in practice, a tendency to downgrade them.

> *Teacher:* We will now begin the exercise!
> *Pupils:* Teacher, we haven't finished yet!
> *Teacher:* What? Are you still on the date?
> *Teacher:* I'm sure that Salvatierra has not finished because he got up to do something else when I was outside of the room.
> *Salvatierra* [standing up]: Yes, teacher!
> *Teacher:* What were you copying?
> *Salvatierra:* The comments to the paragraphs.
> *Teacher:* And were you supposed to copy all comments? Where were you when I gave instructions?
> *Salvatierra:* Here, teacher!
> *Teacher:* It doesn't seem to be so because you did not understand what I told you to do. Let's see Perez, what is it that we had to do?

Perez: We were going to read these and these paragraphs [he shows them in the book]. We were supposed to make comments and to copy the third paragraph and its comments.

In the urban creative school, there was a dynamic 1st-year teacher who was happy with her profession and described herself as "a good teacher." Her pupils clearly felt she was helpful and encouraging compared with other teachers. From our observations, we saw this teacher trying seriously to apply the teaching methods recommended for this type of school. The 4th-year teacher also declared that she liked teaching in spite of having to cope with difficult situations brought about by the children she had to teach. Her pupils declared that they liked her and felt content with her. Our impression, as observers, was that although recognizing the value of being a teacher, she appeared somewhat sad and perhaps frustrated. Also, in her teaching style, there was less individual encouragement given than what might be expected from a school dedicated to developing the children's creativity.

Teacher: Do you know what I have here?
Pupils: Milk tops!
Teacher: What do we usually do with these?
Pupils: We throw them away.
Teacher: Well, we should use them! How could we use them?
Pupils: To make a drawing!
Teacher: What else can we do?
Pupils: Place a coin so it gets marked!
Teacher: How is this different from a drawing?
Pupils: It will be marked — raised!
Teacher: Yes, it will be raised, in relief!

In the rural community school, the 1st-year teacher was 38 years old. Teaching in this school was the longest period she had ever spent in one place.

> I have tried to give as much to education as I can, given my aptitudes, my training, my vocation. I like my profession; I have been teaching for 21 years of which 10 have been teaching the 1st years. I chose this profession because I always wanted to be a teacher.

Her pupils had many good words for her: "Our teacher is nice and very pretty"; "She helps us to learn to read and write, she corrects me"; "I like my teacher, she's good and pretty"; "The teacher helps us when we most need her; in difficult cases, she corrects what is wrong, and that's good, she helps us to learn." Our observations of her teaching showed her as someone who tried to induce children to learn and who appeared to be, at the same time, a pleasant and stimulating person.

Teacher: What you most like is to have a nice school and classrooms.
Pupil [standing]: We could make our room look nice!
Teacher: OK, we will write the sentence [moving to the board].
Teacher [writes on the board]: To make our room look nice.
Teacher: Now, let us read this!
Pupils [reading out]: To make our room look nice.
Igor [stands and says]: That's part of my idea.

The 4th-year teacher in this school was also trained in a Normal School and had taken a number of later in-service courses on methods of teaching and on evaluation techniques. She was 39 years of age. Talking about herself, she said, "I chose my profession because I like it; I have been teaching for 21 years and have always tried to do my utmost as regards my work." Her pupils also were content with her: "I like this teacher very much, because in the other school where I was they would not let me do anything"; "She's a good sport"; "She helps us to imagine things."

On the whole, as we shall see, the teachers of this school were very supportive of the philosophy of the "community" school and worked hard to ensure that children were given the chance to be active and creative within its confines.

The Children

The schools differed in the socioeconomic background of their pupils. In two of the schools, the urban creative and the rural conventional, most of the children came from very poor, unstable home situations. These children all showed signs of restlessness, aggressiveness, and were quite noisy when on their own. In the creative school, they were allowed to manifest their spontaneity. The 1st-year children were still quite uncontrollable, but the 4th-year pupils had become receptive and sociable, although demonstrating a strong questioning behaviour. In the rural conventional school, children appeared subdued and timid during their lessons, but were aggressive and even disrespectful when on their own.

Idalia, who attended the urban creative school, was judged by her teachers to be "restless" and to "fight a lot" with other children. Yet Idalia, an 11 year old in the 4th year, stated that she was happy in school and liked the teachers, comparing the situation favourably with a boarding school[2] she had been sent to for 3rd year: "In the other school, there were many problems and the teacher never stopped them. The children were very rude."

Fernando, a pupil at the rural conventional school, came from a broken family. His father was in prison for trafficking and his mother lived with someone else. During the day, while Fernando's mother was at work, the three children in the family were left with their grandmother. Fernando liked school, his mates, and his teacher, but he disliked the head teacher, whom he described as "bad": "She scolds the children"; "She doesn't come to school."

The populations in the other schools were socioeconomically heterogeneous. Some children came from a lower middle-class background, some had a stable family life, and others lived in abject poverty with only one parent or under the care of a grandmother or aunt. The following description of some pupils in the urban basic school was given to us by one of the teachers who was especially kind and concerned for the children.

- *Nerio* (lives in one of the tower blocks of the neighbourhood) — His parents care for him. He is well behaved, very intelligent, quick, emotionally stable, prompt in his work, always dresses well, likes to be good, smiles, has a sort of inner peace.

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[2] Boarding schools in the Latin American countryside are often intended for poor children and are not at all similar to the private boarding schools elsewhere.

- *Juan Alberto* — He comes from the other extreme. Lives in the *barrio*, but his parents care for him. He and his brother are good dancers; they love to perform; they are well behaved, don't object to being reprimanded if they are at fault. If they are not, they argue back. They are not rebels.
- *Bolivar* — Bolivar has this nickname because he always pays for everything with a bolivar [the local currency]. He lives in the *barrio*. He is a sad boy, has no father, must warm up his food when he gets home. Is alone most of the time; is a somewhat sickly boy.
- *Alfredo* — He lives on the Panamerican [the motorway that runs through the American continent] and sometimes has to wait over an hour for motorcars to let him across the road and come to school. He gets up at 5 in the morning, is 8 years old. He has his breakfast when he arrives in school and can get an *arepa* and a glass of milk at the canteen. He is a serious child!

The background of the children in the rural community school was varied. Some parents owned land, but most were skilled or unskilled rural labourers. We found that the 1st-year children were more open and spontaneous than the 4th-year children, who, in turn, seemed attentive and responsible for the tasks they were asked to perform. They seemed to like school and all those we interviewed had good words for their teachers. For some of these children, however, life was not without problems. Lisbeth's mother was "in a sanatorium," "she has nerve problems and her father is an alcoholic"; she lives with her grandmother and her aunt Blanca, who is responsible for her in school. Carlos, a 13-year-old child, liked school because he "learns things." An orphan who lived with his grandmother, he was the eldest of five children. In the afternoons he worked the land, cared for the chickens, and sometimes had to go out to sell them. He earned 60 bolivares a week (20 Venezuelan bolivers (VEB) = 1 United States dollar (USD)), from which he kept 10 and gave the rest to his grandmother. He liked his classmates because "they are good with me" and "they help me."

Teaching Styles and Construction of Success and Failure

From the point of view of material facilities, all the Venezuelan schools visited were at least adequate, although the teacher–pupil ratio was high (Table 10) for what might be considered a reasonable average in more privileged situations. Teachers, therefore, in spite of the quality of their training and all their goodwill, were limited in what they could do in classrooms of 30–40 pupils.

Largely, the object of teaching did not differ from school to school, being centred on lecturing and question–answer sequences: e.g., "What else did we learn yesterday?"; "How many sides does a polygon have?"; "The first what . . .?"; "How many paragraphs does this reading have?"; "What is the name of this gas, John?"; "Did you finish revising?" For the most part, it was the teacher who led these sequences, which, at their worst, called for one-word answers: e.g., "five"; "the first"; "it's narrative"; "yes." Obviously, other forms of teaching were used, such as practice exercises with correction

Table 10. Characteristics of schools, teachers, and pupils in the Venezuelan study.

	Urban basic	Creative basic	Rural basic	Rural conventional	Urban conventional
Location	Urban	Urban	Rural	Rural	Urban
Quality (space, light, facilities)	Good	Good	Good	Average	Average
Size (no. of pupils)	850	1292	414	436	1021
Pupil socioeconomic status	Middle low	Low	Low	Middle low	Middle low
No. of classrooms observed					
1st year	1	3	1	1	3
4th year	1	3	1	1	3
Teacher–pupil ratio					
1st year	38	37	40	42	39
4th year	40	38	35	38	38
Teacher qualifications	Normal School[a] and university	Normal School and other	Normal School	University	Normal School

[a] Teacher-training college.

at the board or seats, dramatizations, and free group activities and discussions. As we shall see, however, the type of school and the individual teacher's characteristics determined how strong the doses of repetitive recitation were to be during lessons. What is of concern in the analysis of teaching from the perspective of its contribution to success or failure experiences is the way in which teachers address children and the messages they communicate, not just the overt and content-related messages, but those that convey information about a child's standing in the class as well as the encouragement or discouragement mechanisms used. It is these aspects that we discuss in the following paragraphs.

The predominant teaching style in the 1st years of all schools was similar, centred on the purpose of having children learn how to read and write. The syllabic method was used for reading and teacher talk; questioning and responses about factual matters largely dominated the teaching patterns. Intermingled with what were obvious teaching–learning purposes, there was evidence of other intentions related to the communication of values, to the teaching of norms of discipline for school, and to the teaching of behavioural norms for home.

Teacher: Now we will have dictation; write your names and dates down in your exercise books!
[The teacher walks around the room looking at what the children are doing.]
Teacher: Ma, me, mi, mo, mi.
Pupil: Teacher, the "m"?
Teacher: Yes "m," my mother [she repeats this twice]. The first one is "my mother." The second one is "I love my mother" [she repeats this three times].
[The teacher turns to a group of children who are talking. One of the girls points to another.]
Girl: She! She doesn't know anything!
Teacher: Leave her alone!
[The girl shows the teacher her exercise book.]
Girl: Is it this way, teacher?
Teacher [affirmatively]: Uh, uh.
Teacher [talking to some boys]: I love, I love.
Teacher: I love my mother.
[A boy stands and shows the teacher his book.]
Teacher: Huh, that's good!
[The teacher turns to another boy.]
Teacher: Why didn't you bring your pencil? You're bothering! Be quiet!
[The teacher looks at this boy's exercise book and notes that he still is writing the date.]
Teacher: You can write the date later. I love my mother. Third line: My father loves me.
Children [together]: My father loves me.
[The teacher walks around the classroom repeating this sentence over and over again.]

In the conventional schools, the analysis of classroom interactions showed how the purposes related to the correction of behaviour could take on very strong forms of control.

Teacher [to a 4th-year pupil inquiring about his seat work]: Did you finish your questionnaire?
Pupil: No.

> *Teacher:* Then, get on with it!
> *Teacher* [to another pupil]: Did you finish your work? Stop being lazy! If you are going to sit there, then work! Did you hear me, Mike? Work!

The latter part of this excerpt also illustrates a fairly common practice that we have characterized as a "teacher monologue." The following examples are even more illustrative of this practice, which, in fact, is another form of disavowal of the pupils' possible contribution to a lesson.

> *Teacher* [to a 4th-year pupil trying to read out loud]: Read out loud! I can't hear you! I don't know whether you are able to read or not! Don't read the punctuation signs! I'm going to be frank with you: first, I can't hear you!; second, you're moving like a slow wagon!; third, you don't stop at punctuation signs!
> *Teacher* [turning to the other students]: Do you realize that what is said to you is for your own good?
> *Teacher* [to the boy who was reading]: Sit down!

It is conceivable that the practice of "monologuing" was not necessarily a sign of disrespect for children, but more an indication of teacher frustration with the lack of response from pupils. In reality, however, it seemed more to be unconcern, responded by dullness and, therefore, leading to frustration. Unconcern for the children was also discernible in instances where teachers seemed overtly not to care about what happened in the classroom, ignoring events they should have attended to. This attitude is what we have called a *laissez-faire* style.

> *Pupil:* Teacher, teacher, he took my pencil!
> [The teacher ignores the call.]
> *Teacher:* Magali, carry out that operation!
> *Magali* [remains seated]: No, no!
> [The teacher corrects another student who is reading.]
> *Teacher:* This is "la" and this is "lo."
> [The children talk and do other things.]
>
> [Another occasion]
> [A number of sums are on the board for the children to copy and work out. Not all pupils are involved in the work, however, there is a group that is telling stories and jokes. The teacher ignores the disruption and works with a boy on reading.]
> *Pupil* [shouting out to the teacher]: Teacher, teacher! He took my pencil!
> *Teacher* [ignoring the call, speaks to another girl in the class]: Magali, try to figure that out!
> *Magali:* No, no [remains seated].
> [The teacher ignores Magali's response and continues to work with the pupil who is reading.]

The classroom climate in these situations was tense and the children appeared tired and frustrated, thus reinforcing the teacher's own sense of frustration and aimlessness. Often, to carry on a monologue was a way of reacting to continued pupil silence when that teacher had endeavoured to extract responses to specific questions.

In contrast with these forms of authoritarianism in the conventional schools, the basic school teachers seemed more preoccupied with involving children in lesson situations. In these schools, classroom activities, although very similar in structure to those of the conventional schools, did seem to reflect the more progressive philosophy of the school as well as teacher differences in style and personality.

The dynamic 1st-year teacher in the urban creative school appeared to follow the principles behind the experimental program of the school. Reading was taught not with the syllabic method but with the global approach. The children's activities were set out individually according to their ability to read and write. There were usually three groups of children working together in her class.

Teacher [goes to table 1 and provides the eight pupils with a bag of letters and word shapes]: We must try to find these letters that make up your names! Put the letters on one side and the words on the other. Put together what belongs together!

Teacher [goes to table 2 and tells its nine pupils]: We are going to make a list with the names of the people that live in your house.

Teacher [continues]: Well, we'll include those people who, although they do not live in your house, are your relatives.

Teacher [moving on to table 3 with 21 children]: We are going to do an activity for which I will hand out a sheet of paper.

[The children in table 3 are learning to read.]

Teacher: We'll write the word "peluche." Let's see, Nereida, how does the word "peluche" sound to you?

[Nereida remains silent. The teacher turns to another pupil.]

Teacher: Go to the board Eli and write "peluche!"

Teacher [to the other pupils]: Just watch, don't scratch out what you have!

Teacher: Let's see Nereida.

Nereida [goes to the board and writes]: bulia

Teacher [to pupils]: Do you think she could have written this in a different way?

Boy [goes to the board and writes]: UCHR

Teacher: Could that have been written in a different way?

[The boy makes an affirmative sigh.]

Teacher: Do you think the word "peluch" has an "a"?

Pupils [together]: Yes . . . no.

[A pupil goes to the board and writes "PUCH."]

Teacher: Yesterday we wrote the word "dog." Can anybody write "dog"?

[In Spanish, "dog" is "perro," a word similar to what the children are trying to write.]

Teacher: Jennifer, go to the board and write "dog."

[Jennifer goes to the board and writes "perro."]

Teacher: The word "perro" is like "peluche." [She points to the word "puch" written earlier on the board.] What does "p" need to read "pe"?

Teacher: Come here David and add to "p" what is needed for it to read "pe."

David [goes to the board and writes]: pe

Teacher: What does "pe uch" need to become "luch"

David [writes on the board]: l

Teacher: Is the work complete? Who knows what is missing?

Rosa [gets up and goes to the board and writes]: peluche

[The teacher calls on another girl to go to the board and asks her to read out the word; she does so correctly.]

A stronger form of control was exerted by the 4th-year teacher in the same school during a workshop activity.

Teacher: What do you use to make a relief?

[The pupils remain silent.]

Teacher: What do you have in your hands?
Teacher: Ah!
Teacher: I'm going to give you a blank sheet and you must make your own design.
Pupil: I want to do a bolivar [a coin].
Teacher: Well, then you must make a bigger design and not just trace the coin, otherwise it will be too small.
Another boy: What should I do?
Teacher: Anything you like.
Teacher [to the pupils]: You must work out yourselves how to get the relief on the aluminum sheet. I'm not going to help you.
Boy [walking up to the teacher]: Teacher, look!
Teacher: Good!
Pupil: Teacher, can I do a ship?
Teacher: Whatever you want.
[The children continue to work on their designs.]
Teacher: Don't yet do the work on aluminum. You must first prepare the design on the sheet of paper!
Teacher: Only those who show me their work on paper and which I approve may do it on aluminum.
Pupil: Teacher, look!
Teacher: It's all right! But I want to be able to feel with my fingers that it is in relief. How can that be done?
Pupil: Teacher, look!
Teacher: Good, but try to bring the relief out!

The type of school activities appeared to affect the behaviour of pupils in this creative school. During the ordinary lesson situation, there always seemed to be noise with children intervening spontaneously and in a somewhat disorderly manner; during their workshop activities, however, there was much more concentration and silence.

In the rural community school, teaching was heavily affected by the nature of the school. Classroom activities that, in the basic schools, are organized around "centres of interest" *(unidades generadoras de aprendizaje)* were specifically related to local, agricultural, and other vocational needs and problems of the surrounding community. The school also engaged in a series of activities related to community development, such as providing recreational opportunities, family counseling, and literacy training, and organizing other types of cultural events. Throughout the observation of this school, we found how these broad aims were carried out and how they affected teaching practices, so that the contents appeared to be more related to the particular nature of the school and to the children's background.

[The daily activity is written on the board: Environmental Conditions Needed for Good Health.]
Teacher: What should the environment be like?
Pupils: Clean, without flies or bugs.
Teacher: Should the windows be open or closed?
Pupils: Closed.
Teacher: What?
Pupils: Open.
Pupils: Because we might be "knocked out."
[In Spanish, children used a colloquial expression: *porque tiembla el cacho.*]
Pupil: Teacher, my mother can't leave the windows open because crooks with mandrax pills [drugs] might come in.

Teacher: Ah!
Pupil: Teacher, what does that about "conditions" mean?
Teacher: Before going to bed, what must you do?
Pupil: Brush my teeth!
Teacher: That's a condition!

In the community school, small group teaching was a common practice not only for the 1st but also the 4th year.

[The children enter the room and immediately organize themselves into three groups.]
Teacher: We are going to review fractions! [The teacher draws three squares, colours them, and writes on them.] 3/3; 2/3; 1/3.
Teacher: Juan Ramon, can you explain this?
Juan Ramon: Here, there are three-thirds because there are three coloured squares.
Teacher [moving to another group]: Can you tell me what you would compare with this?
Pupil: It could be a whole biscuit and a fraction.
Teacher: What does the whole biscuit look like. Is it the same as the fractional parts?
Another pupil [from the same group]: Teacher, I would like to explain!
Teacher: Yes, do so!
Pupil [going to the board and pointing to the squares with a ruler]: This three-thirds, two-thirds, and one-third.
Teacher: Gilberto, can you repeat what the fractions on the board are?
[Gilberto repeats correctly.]
Teacher [picks some chalk and writes]: 3/3
Gilberto [writes]: 1/3
Teacher: I told you three-thirds.
Gilberto [writes]: 3/3
Teacher: We see now three-thirds.
Teacher: Look for three-thirds on the board.
[Gilberto finds it and reads out.]
Teacher: There it is written in letters, look for it in numbers. Look, find, and then write!
Gilberto [writes]: 3/3 is three-thirds.

Practical activities brought the children and the teacher together more intimately than found in other school situations. One morning, for example, we encountered the 4th year engaged in cleaning the school because on the previous Friday, they had noticed it was dirty.

[A boy tells the teacher he will ask the gardener to lend him the hose to water the gardens and yard.]
Teacher: Yes, go ahead!
[Pupil goes to the hose, connects to the tap, and begins to water. Other teachers are watching the children.]
Teacher: Jose Luis, water the plants carefully and when you finish go to the classroom.
[The teacher tells two other children to wash their hands if they have finished. Some children sweep enthusiastically, collecting the dry leaves in a neat pile and picking them up with their spades to throw them in the rubbish bins. A girl brings a broom and cleans the hallways near the main entrance.]
First boy [to another close to him]: Where is the paraffin?
Second boy: What do you want it for?
First boy: The teacher wants it.
Second boy: No!

Teacher, parents, and pupils collaborate in repairing a rural community school in Venezuela.

Teacher [overhearing this]: I heard what you said!

[Second boy surrenders the bottle of paraffin.]

Teacher: Now line up because the committees have all finished their work!

Teacher: I want you to watch carefully during break time those children who throw papers around and tell them that they should not do so. It's enough for today!

[The girls form two lines as do the boys. When this is completed, they begin to sing the national anthem conducted by the music teacher. Having finished singing, one of the boys tells the children who have their hands up saluting the flag that now they may rest. The children then walk into the classrooms. As they do so, they mark their attendance on a board. The teacher explains that there is no roll call and that the children just take their attendance cards to the board.]

Teacher: Everything here is very dirty. Clean your desks with a cloth.

[A boy stands, takes a cloth, and cleans some of the desks.]

Teacher: So how did you spend your weekend?

Pupils: All right, teacher!

Teacher: Did you do your homework?

Pupils: Yes.

[They take out their exercise books and place them on the desk.]

Teacher: Each group will check their work!

[The teacher explains to us that this is a normal practice and that the children correct each other by drawing a black line in those books where no homework can be found and by drawing a blue line where there is completed homework.]

Teacher: Did you finish? Your group, Luis . . . have you finished? Liz, Yolimar?

[The teacher goes to the board and says as she writes.]

Teacher: This was the homework. Those who were absent on Friday must write it down and do it for tomorrow!

In summary, although schools did not differ markedly in the general style of conducting their lessons and the recitation method was clearly the preferred mode of teaching, the nature of the school did allow for some variations. The experimental innovation characteristic of the urban creative and the rural community schools was clearly apparent in the structure and type of teaching activities; difficult children seemed more comfortable in these settings than in the more traditional settings of the conventional schools. It is difficult to conclude, however, that school differences went beyond what has been described, as it was clear that differences among teachers were also an important factor in the style variations found in classrooms. These style variations, in turn, did not affect what was still an important factor, even in the most progressive school: that teachers clearly controlled the nature and scope of learning activities.

Judgment and encouragement mechanisms

Despite the accepted versions of what constitutes school success or failure, which we shall consider further on, there is much information that pupils receive about their standing from the ways they are recognized, encouraged, and corrected during lessons. Teacher and school differences were noted in this respect, as the teachers of the conventional schools tended to be more arbitrary in their judgment and encouragement stategies than teachers of the basic schools; this was especially true of the teachers responsible for the younger children. The following examples illustrate what we might call denigratory forms of assessment of what a pupil is doing.

> *Teacher:* Read out loud! I can't hear you! I don't know whether you are able to read or not. Don't read punctuation signs! I'm going to be frank with you: first, I can't hear you!; second, you're moving like a slow wagon; third, you don't stop at punctuation signs!
> *Teacher* [turning to the other pupils]: Do you realize that what is said to you is for your own good?
> *Teacher* [to the pupil who was reading]: Sit down!
>
> [Another occasion: during a reading lesson]
> *Teacher:* Ninoska, read!
> [Ninoska reads in a very low tone of voice.]
> *Teacher:* Do you hear Ninoska? I don't. I can't hear anything. If you ever become president and deliver a speech how will anybody hear you?
> *Another pupil:* She will have a microphone.
> *Teacher:* Silence!
> [The pupils are restless; two are fighting with each other; the teacher ignores them.]
> *Teacher:* Gregorio, read!
> *Teacher* [to Gregorio as he reads]: You don't read badly. There are others who are worse! Sit down!

A contrasting mode of dealing with the difficulty of speaking out loud experienced by children from poor backgrounds is provided in the following excerpt from a lesson in one of the basic schools.

> [Pupils are seated in circles and the teacher discusses with them their reading difficulties while requesting suggestions for improvement.]
> *Teacher:* Elizabeth, what was Dajanira suggesting to Enrique?
> *Elizabeth:* Well, that he should practice his lessons at home in order for it to go well.

Juan [as he raises his hand]: To stop being afraid he should read to his aunt or to his mother.
Teacher: We are talking critically about what must be done to improve reading. Why do you think he is afraid?
Mario: Because he reads so low!
Teacher [turning to the other children]: Why do most of you think Enrique is afraid?
Pupils [together]: Because he said so!
Teacher: So we are able to judge what is the matter based on what he said?
Luchin [requesting to speak]: If the teacher asks him to speak out in front of other people, she wants those people to help him; if he says what's wrong, then the others may make fun of him.
Teacher: What would you recommend?
Luchin: To keep quiet!
Msruja: He must tell someone, he must!
Teacher [to the affected boy]: Do you agree with that recommendation?
Enrique: Yes.
Pedro: I could see that when a lesson was about to begin, he would stand trembling of fear.
[Enrique makes a gesture toward the teacher and she turns to him.]
Teacher: Is that true?
Enrique: It used to be . . . .
Teacher: Let's think about the suggestions you gave Enrique regarding reading. Hector and Enrique, to whom did you give more suggestions?
Pupils [together]: To Enrique. Enrique is better at reading than Hector.

Other messages relating to a pupil's capability were transmitted via favouritism toward some pupils and disregard for others. Patricia was a favoured pupil who successfully completed her year. She came from a disadvantaged background but had a stronger personality than other children in her class. Her apparent self-confidence led her to assert her role as a student using her teacher's words: "It is to learn in order to become a professional and to depend wholly upon myself." Patricia was clearly acknowledged as a steering factor in her class and singled out for special responsibilities such as taking over a younger class if a teacher was absent. Her teacher considered her more as an aide than as a pupil.

[The teacher walks back to the end of the room with some white papers and begins to cover the display board.]
Teacher [to Patricia]: This paper is dirty. Why?
Patricia: It was the morning shift that did that!
Teacher: Did you bring your scissors?
Patricia: I forgot them.
Teacher: Why? You knew that today we were doing the display for the board?
Teacher [turning to the other children whom she has ignored until now and preparing to walk out of the room with Patricia]: You! Work on the language lesson that was set for the exam!
[Patricia comes back into the room; the teacher follows her holding a pair of scissors in her hands. Patricia goes to the teacher's desk (the teacher is now cutting some strips of blue paper). The teacher and Patricia talk about something. The teacher hands Patricia a blue strip and she goes off to the display board where she begins to take the white paper off.]
Teacher [talking to a boy who has stood up]: Did you finish revising the questions?
Pupil: No.
Teacher: Then revise!
Teacher: Valenzuela, did you finish?

Valenzuela: Yes!
Teacher: Mariana, did you finish?
Mariana: Yes!
Teacher: Then, come and help me!
[Valenzuela and Mariana walk toward the teacher's desk.]
Patricia: Mariana, come here!
[Mariana turns, but does not move away from where she is.]
Patricia [visibly angry]: Mariana!
Teacher: Mariana, go and help Patricia!
[Mariana obeys and starts to help Patricia remove the white paper from the board.]

Information about a child's disadvantaged background or limitations in intellectual behaviour were used by some teachers as indicators of his or her potential failure. The inadvertent consequence of this judgment was either to treat a child kindly but without encouragement or to recriminate him or her constantly for poor learning or misbehaviour. Children might then be classified as potential failures and, in some cases, as in that of Fernando, the prophecy would be fulfilled.

Pedro

He is 12 years old and is the 10th of 13 brothers. He lives with his brothers because, as he explains, "my mother had cancer; one night they took her and the next day she was dead; my father left, he lives alone." But he keeps in contact with his father: "He gives us pennies for food and when he doesn't, my older brother buys it." He says that he works with a gentleman: "I help him stick blocks and prepare the mix, he pays me 20 to 30 bolivares a day, I keep the money or give it to my brothers for them to keep." Pedro thinks the school "is great, I have friends and have always gone to the same one." He likes maths, language, and hygiene; the teacher "is caring, she explains everything that she puts on the board." For Pedro, failure is "when sometimes something falls apart" and success is "when I am promoted to other years"; he tells himself, "I have to study in order to be able to go to work." Pedro's teacher thinks he is a hard-working boy.

Pedro passed his 4th year with 15 points.

Fernando

Fernando has been 2 years in this school. He went to a concentrated school for his first 2 years. Fernando's teacher says of him "he doesn't do his homework," he "shows no interest in the class," and he "is absent minded." Fernando comes from a broken family; his mother lives with a man called Luis, but Fernando doesn't know his surname. She works hard, leaves home very early, and returns home at 8 o'clock every night. He and his three siblings (two girls and a boy) are left with their grandmother. When he comes home, Fernando watches TV until Mosquita Muerta [a program at 2300] comes on. Sometimes he visits his father, who lives alone, and helps him clean his house, put the rubbish out, and clean his yard. Fernando likes school but not the head teacher, whom he finds "bad": "She doesn't come to school." He likes his teacher and classmates: "They are good with me and I am good with them." He also says "I care about my mother; when she comes home late I am worried. She leaves work at six but sometimes she comes home at eight." To this boy, to be successful means "to pass the year even if it is not very well" and failure is "to play ball, not study, and to have bad marks." Fernando explains that he goes to school to learn to write and to count so that he will be able to work.

Fernando failed with 5 points.

Another way of considering a child's background was to deal with behavioural limitations (which could be traced to the home) in a manner that included an explanation of the behaviour being taught. This was evident in the lessons of one of the teachers in the urban basic school. Although placing emphasis, like other teachers, on behavioural norms, she attempted to stimulate thought about them.

> *Teacher:* First of all, we must recall the norms of good speech and attentiveness.
> *Juanito:* To be attentive when someone is talking.
> *Luis:* To raise your head when you want to say something.
> *Teacher:* To pay attention to what someone asks you.
>
> [Another occasion]
> *Teacher* [during a sewing lesson]: There are many boys whose mothers will not allow them to sew buttons or a seam because these mothers say it's "women's work." But that is not so. There is nothing wrong with sewing!
> *Teacher:* They also do not let boys enter the kitchen, but boys must help at home.

This same teacher was often seen using current affairs as a subject for discussion with the children and appeared concerned for the children's perception of the world around them.

> *Teacher:* I don't know whether you heard last night that schools today are to organize a small act of solidarity with Argentina. Solidarity means that we should stand by them.
> *Teacher:* Rosalia?
> *Rosalia:* My mother said that they [the Argentinians] are going to fight for the Malvinas [the Falkland Islands].
> *Teacher* [looking at another pupil]: See how these children know what is happening!
> *Mario:* Argentina will fight the English!
> *Teacher:* Miguel, why are they fighting?
> *Miguel:* For a piece of Venezuela.
> *Teacher:* No, my lovely, not for Venezuela; for a piece of land that is an island. What is the island called?
> *Pupils* [together]: The Malvinas!

Conceptualization of success and failure

On the whole, there did not appear to be great differences between schools in the way in which the actions involved defined the conditions for success and failure. The official definition of success in terms of number of points gained was accepted as an indication of whether children could or could not pass from one class to another. What was of interest, however, was the definition that parents, teachers, and children gave to "success" and "failure" beyond that of passing from one year to another, as well as their understanding of who was mainly responsible for these outcomes.

Among parents and teachers, success was seen in terms of long-range objectives such as "behavioural change to enable children to have a stable future," "fulfil the desired aims so that they may be dignified citizens of the future," and "see children educated, with a career and a family." Failure, in its long-range meaning, was obviously seen as the contrary situation to success and, especially, as children conducting themselves in ways considered to be objectionable: "I feel failed or, better, disappointed when I see a pupil behaving differently from what I would expect him to do."

In practice, however, teachers operated with concepts of failure that were more closely linked to the fulfillment of immediate requests. For example, in communicating the punishment for not bringing homework, teachers could also deliver a message of mistrust in the ability of a particular pupil to improve his or her learning or behaviour. In the face of misbehaviour, the message conveyed might be that the teacher's favour was lost: "You are an intelligent child, but you misbehave, so I can't forgive you!" Immediate failure, as in learning to write, was conveyed to the child as a promise of future failure: "You cannot write, and so you will not be able to sign your name when it comes to exercising your citizen rights."

Strictly speaking, failure, in terms of repetition of the year, should not occur in the first 4 years of primary school in Venezuela. Yet, in the conventional schools, we found children who had probably repeated more than 1 year, given their age, and who, in any case, were experiencing failure in individual content areas. The attribution of responsibility for failure among them varied, although we often found children telling us that it was their teacher's fault that this had happened. However, declarations such as the following showed the contradictory nature of their perceptions: "It's me, because if I misbehave my parents will be summoned. I am responsible for myself, for what I do to my mates. One must try to work and not repeat the same class. I will learn or not depending on how well I pay attention to what she [the teacher] says."

For most children, to fail was the same thing: being left behind, not reaching the "pass" mark, and, as expressed in the preceding example, involving the sadness of being "told off" by parents or teachers. Their conclusion, therefore, elicited presumably from the many classroom messages offered, was that had they worked harder, this experience would not have been theirs.

Conclusions

Although this chapter concludes with thoughts on failure, it should not be inferred that unconcern for the children's success was a dominant feature in the schools we visited and among the teachers whose classes we observed. Objective conditions for a duller form of learning experience were found in the conventional schools as repetition and drill were practiced in more authoritarian contexts than those found in basic schools. These forms, however, were to a large extent what teachers considered to be appropriate for a child to learn how to read, write, and count. Such minimal cognitive objectives were also those of the basic schools, although in the creative and community schools, for example, other contents were also taught that had greater practicality and attractiveness for the children. Also, more variations to the recitation style of teaching were found.

The disturbing reflection that comes from talking to teachers, children, and parents and seeing life in the schools and classrooms is not that teachers are responsible for failure, but that they are unaware of the way in which they contribute to the outcome. Most of the teachers we talked to seemed to care for their pupils and, with more or less of a sense of frustration, for their work. But there was a whole unexamined area relating to their mode of addressing and correcting pupils and the potentially discouraging messages conveyed through this mode to their pupils.

Ministerio de Educación. 1981. Modelo normativo de educación basica. Oficina Sectorial de Planificación y Presupuesto, División de Curiculo, Caracas, Venezuela.

6

Teachers can be Different: A Bolivian Case

Maritza B. de Crespo

In what might be considered one of the most beautiful spots in the world, above the city and almost touching the sky, we found a school in the midst of the Altiplano landscape that was different. Its difference, however, was not related to its location or to the quality of its buildings, for, as we shall see, the area and the school were very poor. Its difference had to do with what teachers and pupils were doing and the way in which the school related to the surrounding community.

The people of Pampahasi (about 5000) live in mud, self-built houses with corrugated zinc roofs. Their fathers, mostly of Aymara and Quechua origins, came from the rural areas hoping to do better near the city of La Paz. Until recently, they had neither light nor running water, but because of their concerted efforts as a community, they now enjoy these comforts. Those who find work are construction workers, miners, vendors, municipal employees, or servants in the more affluent homes of La Paz. The community believes in organization and has four neighbour committees, four mother's clubs, a parent–teacher association, and a series of soccer clubs.

The school was set up some 5 years ago by the same headmaster and teachers who were there when we did our fieldwork. It is a centre for community activities of all sorts, including courses offered, on a voluntary basis, by the teachers. Thus, on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings, the school is busy with local mothers who have come to learn to read and write. Few of the children attending the school are fluent in Spanish and at home they speak one of the main indigenous languages: Quechua or Aymara.

To understand the theme of this chapter, which is about the school of Pampahasi and one of its teachers, we must say something about the style of teaching we encountered in most classrooms of the other schools we observed (for a description of the schools, see Chapter 3). Throughout our 2 years of work in those schools, we found very little difference from lesson to lesson in the way in which teaching was conducted; it was almost always mechanistic, monotonous, and authoritarian, and largely centred on questioning and repetition, as seen in the following excerpt from a 1st-year class.

Teacher [writing on the board]: MA - MA: ma-me-mi-mo-mu, PA - PA: pa-pe-pi-po-pu, DE - DO: di-do-da-du-de

Teacher [pointing to the words and syllables]: Now, all of you, repeat!

[Pupils repeat loudly as they follow the teacher's fingers on the board.]
Teacher: Good, now let's see if this row can beat the other.
Pupils [repeat shouting]: MA - ME . . .
Teacher: What were we talking about?
Pupils [together]: Etc., etc., etc.
Teacher: Etc.? Is that all? Go on writing!
Teacher [dictating]: "Through means of a pleasant sound . . . ."
Teacher [interrupting the dictation]: I think it is better if you do some drawing. You may draw a *charango* [native instrument], a piano, or a guitar.
[Pupils begin to draw.]
Teacher [after a while]: Put your books away! Now, what is a sound?
[The teacher begins to talk about what she was dictating earlier.]
Teacher: Now silence, what is a sound?
[Pupils remain silent.]
Teacher: What is a sound?
[Pupils talk among themselves but do not respond.]
Teacher: Shh! I am asking you!
Juan: The vibration of one body against another.
Teacher: Let's see. Who can tell what is a sound?
[Pupils remain silent.]
Teacher: Let me see, who can tell me what a sound is?
[Pupils still silent.]
Pedro: The vibration . . .
Teacher [interrupting]: Of what?
[Pedro does not respond.]
Raul: The vibration of two bodies!
Teacher: All right! And what are unpleasant sounds?
Pupil: Tin.
Teacher: Yes, but not just tin; also the screeching of a radio Chrruu, is a noise . . .
Pupil: Which is unpleasant to hear.
Teacher: Very good, and what would be a pleasant one?
Pupil: A record.
Teacher: Yes! Also a piano. Now, how is a sound transmitted?

This example not only illustrates a form of teaching based on questions and answers in which the children habitually are drilled, but it also presents an example of an often arbitrary mode of teaching whereby activities are varied without an evident purpose as, in this case, going from dictation to drawing to questioning.

The noticeable feature about the style of teaching in most of the classrooms we observed was its support for a form of submissive acquiescence similar to the manner in which the childrens' parents had to relate to the *patrones* (employers or white-collar workers) in the city. The children were exposed to fixed sets of beliefs expressed in school rituals and in sentences they must endlessly repeat. They had to learn about a culture considered to be superior but were not given much help in establishing meaningful connections with their own culture. This domination was not only brought about through the content and mode of learning but was also sanctioned through the system of rewards and punishments: "If you don't read this out correctly, I will give you a 001" (a bad mark).

Attempts at resisting the drive to passivity among the children were often suppressed.

> *Teacher* [to children]: Shut up! Shut up! Edwin stop talking . . . We will now, . . . write.
> *Pupil* [dictates a word out loud]: Seso [brain].
> *Teacher:* No, no. You will write "tomato" using the "t" in "tic-tac."

Occasionally, children were able to salvage the initiative to improve their learning.

> [While a teacher is correcting homework, she asks pupils to find words in the dictionary. We overheard a group working.]
> *First pupil:* Whoever finds the word first will be the winner!
> *Second pupil:* And we will give him this pencil!
> *Pupils* [together]: Right!
> *Second pupil:* Look for the word "headmaster!"
> [The group begins to look the word up turning pages very quickly.]
> *Third pupil:* Here it is, headmaster. I found it. Give me the prize!
> *Second pupil* [handing out the pencil]: Yes, we'll play this way!

As most teachers do, those we observed considered themselves central to the organization of the teaching–learning process, although not necessarily responsible for its outcomes. Simply being there, a teacher would lead the children to behave in certain ways. The moment the teacher walked into the room, talk, laughter, and movements abruptly ceased and the children turned expectantly to await the coming orders. "Silence, silence! Where on earth do you think you are?" is the call that transforms dynamism into rigidity and submission. Teachers functioned in different ways, including various mixtures of authoritarianism and benevolence. Most of the time, however, they strived for total control of the classroom, deciding whether to involve pupils in their lessons and whether to sanction or deny value to what the pupils did.

> *Teacher:* Repeat the seventh table!
> [Pupil begins to recite the table.]
> *Teacher:* Louder!
> [Pupil continues to recite in a low voice.]
> *Teacher:* Are you not feeling well?
> *Pupil:* Yes, it's my throat.
> *Teacher* [moving closer to the pupil]: All right, continue!
>
> [Another occasion]
> *Pupil:* Me, miss?
> *Teacher:* You, be quiet! Silence! I'll tell you! Eliodoro, your ears are dirty!
>
> [Another occasion]
> *Teacher:* Julio, what's going on? Don't you know? I'm not going to write on the board. I'm going to dictate.
> [The teacher writes the word "plane" on the board.]
> *Teacher:* This is a subheading [she repeats this three times]. Claudia, take off that hat, it's covering your face, you can't see anything. Miguel Angel, what's wrong with you? Dionisio, what are you consulting about? Mariela, oh those friends! So, here is the subheading. Bertha, a subtitle Bertha . . . . This is a heading. It's about time that you understand . . . .

Despite this overwhelming domination of the classroom and their virtual forcing of children into submissiveness, teachers theoretically imagined the good pupil as being alert, asking questions, and providing examples of creative learning. With this image in mind, they attributed the difference between their ideal pupil and their actual pupil to background limitations.

Teacher [referring to a pupil with learning difficulties]: This child has problems at home, with his family. He seems to have traumas due to the little help he gets. The second case, is a boy who repeated his first year . . . and now, although in second, cannot cope with reading nor writing. I think he must have some family problem.

To a large extent, it seemed to us that while teachers considered the poor background of a child as responsible for failure at school, they made little effort to help children integrate their home and personal experiences with what was being taught in school. Few children would have seen a piano, so to use it as an example seemed out of place; this was also the case in a particular reference to a thousand peso note (local currency).

Maria: In our shop nobody buys with thousand peso notes.
Juan: Are there any thousand peso notes?

"Luis," said his teacher, "is nil in reading and nil in writing," yet Luis led a life that involved responsible out of school activities and showed an interest for events in the outside world.

Interviewer: You want to learn, don't you?
Luis: Yes, but not in class, I don't like my lessons.
Interviewer: Why don't you like your lessons?
Pupil: Because they are boring, always the same, and the teacher always repeats the same things.
Interviewer: Oh, how is your teacher?
Luis: Good, she is very good, but she doesn't know things.
Interviewer: She doesn't know? What is it she doesn't know?
Luis: She doesn't know who was killed the other day.
Interviewer: Who was killed?
Luis: You're just like her. It was that person whom they threw a bomb during the parade.
Interviewer: Oh, yes, Sadat. Do you know why they killed him?
Luis: Yes, because he was a friend of the *gringos* [the Americans].
Interviewer: And your teacher didn't know that.
Luis: No, she doesn't like to speak about those things.
Interviewer: Why do you say that?
Luis: Because when I try to talk to her she says "shhhh . . . better keep quiet."

[Later]
Interviewer: Do you talk to your teacher?
Luis: No!
Interviewer: Why is that?
Luis: Because I can't!
Interviewer: Why?
Luis: Because I can't . . . only sometimes!
Interviewer: Oh, sometimes! And what do you talk about then?
Luis: About lessons only, but I don't remember.
Interviewer: Does she talk to you about your homework?
Luis: No, she only corrects my notebook.
Interviewer: And when she looks at it what does she say?
Luis: "Wrong" somedays. Somedays "good."
Interviewer: And does she call you to the board?
Luis: Only once, have I been called!
Interviewer: Only once this year?
Luis [affirmatively]: Mmmm.

[Later]
Interviewer: And do you talk to your dad?
Luis: Yes.
Interviewer: What about?
Luis: About reading, adding, subtracting!
Interviewer: Don't you speak about football, your home, other things?
Luis: No, only sometimes about football.

[Later]
Interviewer: With whom do you prefer to talk?
Luis: With my friends!

[Later]
Interviewer: What do you do on Saturdays and Sundays when you are not in school?
Luis: I play a bit, then go with my dad to the *Alto*.
Interviewer: To the *Alto*? Is your home there?
Luis: No, my home is not there! I go there to sell machines.
Interviewer: You sell machines? You help your dad in his work?
Luis: Yes, to sell machines.
Interviewer: And how much does the machine cost?
Luis: It sells at about eight thousand pesos!
Interviewer: What kind of a machine is it?
Luis: A sewing machine.

As we reflected on the material in our observation and interview notes, it was easy to detect the nature of the power structure that supports the roles these children will play as they grow up in a society that diminishes participation for the poor and indigenous groups. It was also easy to notice the cultural competing forces in their lives: that of the school or urban culture and that of the Aymara community.[1] These examples lead us to suggest that as early as primary school, the destinies of Aymara children are moulded as they are shown the superiority of urban Spanish culture and are socialized into accepting that their ethnic origins make them servants of that culture. In summary, as witnesses to authoritarian, one-sided modes of communication requiring specific responses, we understood how children might find it easier to be compliant and uncritical and, like their parents, remain silent.

A good example of the distance between the two worlds was given during a meeting at one of the schools of the mothers' club. The attendees at this meeting were distributed into three distinct groups. The women who spoke only Spanish and wore skirts sat in the centre of the room. They were the only women that spoke out and influenced the outcome of the meeting. The women seated on the floor at each side of the room, toward the front, spoke Spanish and Aymara; they spoke to the women in the centre of the room in Spanish and spoke among themselves in Aymara. The group of women seated on the floor at the back of the room wore the Indian *pollera* (full skirt) and spoke only Aymara. These women never spoke out during the meeting or to anyone in the other groups; they only spoke among themselves.

The feeling of belonging to the lower echelons of society and, therefore, having little influence was voiced by the mother of a child in one of the schools.

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[1] Other studies on the Bolivian rural education system have reaffirmed this view, even when experiences such as the Ayullu School, based on the indigenous system of social organization, had been implemented (see Huacani et al. 1978).

> Yes, I'm on good terms with the teachers. I am a humble woman and should not argue back. I don't like to argue when they [the teachers] explains us about the *cuota* [money for school activities]. They just tell me how much it is and I give it.

Teaching in Pampahasi: A Different Style

Senora Rosa had been lucky to begin her professional career in the provinces in a school where there was a desire to change established practices for the benefit of pupils. After completing her 2-year "apprenticeship" there, she went to another provincial school where she was able to try out new teaching techniques: "The nuns allowed me to carry out group teaching; they placed emphasis on personalized work. We were able to work with parents, and engage with them in educational activities." As a young teacher having taught for only 7 years and having been in supportive school environments, senora Rosa had not suffered the frustration experienced by many of her colleagues.

The headmaster of the school at Pampahasi, where we found senora Rosa, was a warm-hearted, sincere educator. He was one of the few teachers we encountered who felt happy with what he was doing.

> Yes, I am happy. From the beginning, from the time I began as a teacher, I tried to serve education and to perform effectively . . . . I like to work in poor neighbourhoods because I can adapt to such situations. I come from that culture so it can be said that I can adapt, I can talk, I can speak in the vernacular languages.

Senora Rosa was teaching 4th- and 5th-year classes in one room when we observed her lessons. She had thirty 4th- and thirteen 5th-year students and was responsible for a 3rd-year group. Her teaching style conformed to the typical questioning pattern found in other classrooms, but we noticed that she was concerned with introducing meaning and relevance to her questions and with allowing her pupils to contribute to the lesson.

> *Teacher:* The first, the first number. Which is it?
> *Pupils* [some together]: One.
> *Teacher:* And the second one?
> *Pupils* [more of them together]: Two.
> [They continue in this way until the teacher reaches 10.]
> *Teacher:* And number eleven, what would it be?
> *Pupils* [several together]: Eleventh.
> *Teacher:* And twenty?
> *Pupils* [thinking]: Mmmm.
> *Girl:* Twentieth.
> [The transformation from "twenty" to ""twentieth" is more difficult in Spanish than in English.]
> *Boy:* Two-tenths.
> *Teacher:* What Ema has said is right, but she must pronounce it carefully.
> [The teacher refers to the correct pronunciation of the "v" sound which in Spanish tends to be confused with "b" sound.]
> *Boy:* Can you teach us twenty, thirty, forty?
> *Teacher:* Yes, we will go on. Now, what would thirty be?
> *Boy:* Thirtieth.
> *Teacher:* Very well, but repeat with me thirtieth.
> *Teacher:* Do you remember who arrived in the tenth place in the car race?

[She refers to a race held the previous Sunday.]
[Pupils remain silent for a while.]
Boy: Carlos the Chinese.
Teacher: Who arrived in the thirtieth place?
[Pupils remain silent.]
Teacher: Well, you will have to find out. You will have to read the newspaper. Why do you say first, second, third, or fourth?
Boy: In order to learn how to write.
Another boy: Because it is orderly.
A girl: Yes, to order.
Teacher: Yes, we know that these numbers allow us to establish an order and that is why they are called ordinals.
Teacher: Now, let us see the order in which you have finished your compositions [an activity in which they had been engaged earlier].

Several things make this example atypical. First, the teacher alerts children to changes they should think about as they recite the ordinal numbers. Moving from the 19th to the 20th ordinal in Spanish involves a change in the word ending as well as a change in the rationale for deciding how the coming ordinals should be named. The teacher stops when she reaches the 11th ordinal and emphasizes the question. Children need to recognize that, although the first 10 ordinals involve adding the ending *imo* or *avo* to the cardinal number, when they reach the 20th ordinal, they must use a totally new word, *vigesimo*, and proceed in this manner to say *trigesimo* (30th), *cuadragesimo* (40th), and so on. Second, the teacher drills this lesson by using examples relevant to the children's experience. For example, she refers to the winner of last week's car race, which most children in the community would know about. Finally, her questioning mode is less reliant on factual information and more reliant on reasoning, while providing new information or telling children how they can obtain information: "Adela, you will have to find out! You will have to read the newspaper."

A contrasting segment is presented at the beginning of this chapter (p. xx), with the ritualization of activities such as dictation, the arbitrary changes of activities, the use of examples removed from the children's experience (such as a piano), and the forcing of the children's responses into a predefined mould.

Reading the newspaper was an activity that senora Rosa encouraged, mostly to develop language skills. The children were asked to bring clippings about news they found important and these were discussed in class. She also encouraged group activities involving leadership roles as well as personal responsibility. A good example was the pantomime activity. After showing the children what to do, senora Rosa asked them to form groups of 8–10 and elect a representative. The groups were to enact a story in mime and the rest of the class was to discover what each story was about. After allowing time for the children to prepare their sketches, each group was asked to perform.

Teacher: We shall begin with Tito's group.
[The group performs their act.]
Teacher [to the rest of the class]: What did you see?
Boy: They went to the woods, they got tired, they had a drink, they ate, they filled their rucksacks, returned, had a drink, and went to sleep when it got late.

Teacher: Who else can tell me what he or she saw?

Boy: They went to the woods, they walked a lot, they had a sandwich, had a drink, and went to sleep.

Teacher: Now, can you criticize the group's performance. For example, who did not do anything, who did not work, who made mistakes. Especially, who expressed better on their faces fatigue, happiness, thirst, hunger?

Sandra: Hugo did it best.

Tito: The girls were talking; they did not carry their rucksacks, they did nothing. Hugo and Walter were the best.

Teacher: Now, let's have the group explain to us what they wanted to show.

An obvious purpose of this activity was to stimulate the children's imagination and their narrative skills. However, unless one understands that the children in this class could speak little Spanish and lived in an isolated community, it is hard to grasp the full importance of activities such as this. In addition, opportunities were given for criticism, as in the last of the actors' performances and the girls' inactivity, and for eliciting the reasons for carrying out certain actions, as in the explanation of the meaning of the show.

In exploring senora Rosa's concept of teaching, we relied not only on the observation of her classroom style but also on her out of class activities, on her relationship with parents, the headmaster, and other teachers, and on what the children had to say about her; we also considered her own views about education. We found that senora Rosa had a better working relationship with her headmaster than did the other teachers in this study. For example, senora Rosa agreed with her headmaster that the curriculum, although a framework for teaching, need not be adhered to slavishly.

> I think it [the curriculum] is well conceived, but it does not relate properly to different environments. So we have to take from it what is needed, in accordance with what this area and its pupils require. Of course, I know that not even 20% of the pupils here will reach the university, but that is why we take more care than needed, so that they learn the basic four operations, so that they can survive if they have to sell potatoes, and we concern ourselves that they also learn to write and measure, and think and express themselves . . . .

On the strength of her belief that to educate properly she must understand her children, during her free time, senora Rosa enrolled in a course on learning disabilities at a nearby medical centre. As the course progressed, she endeavoured to convey something of what she was learning to her colleagues at school. The school also followed this line of preoccupation and had enlisted the services of the same medical centre to diagnose children with learning disabilities or other related problems.

A special concern of senora Rosa was her relationship with the parents. Most of the teachers in the other schools referred to parents as begin "irresponsible, uncommunicative, averse to participate in school activities and who couldn't care less for them, who let their children do as they please." Senora Rosa thought otherwise: "With parents, we have very good relationships; we have a lot of contact, they are very open, they trust me quite a bit."

For her pupils, senora Rosa acted as a bridge between what occurred at school and what occurred in the rest of their world (the street and their family). From parents she elicited a sense of trust that enabled them to speak

In Bolivia, Indian mothers often spent much of the day around the school. Here they are seen watching their children during break time.

of their family situation, while also helping them to know and understand something of what she was doing with their children at school.

Throughout our conversations with this teacher, we were able to detect her care for the children and her belief in their value as individuals. This attitude strongly contrasted with the denigratory attitudes observed in other classrooms, aptly summarized in a mother's frustration at the labeling of her child by the teacher.

> The teacher is bad. She tells him "you are an ass." I think they have traumatized Boris . . . . He has been told "you're an ass" and that's it . . . and Boris came back one day and said to me: "I'm an ass mumi, and I'm not going back to school!"

Senora Rosa believed that "as teachers we must treat our children with respect and affection, they are persons, or don't we know it?" She also considered it important to "know what they think, what they feel, what they suffer. These, our children, suffer a lot and it seems as though we teachers do not know it and that is why we are strict with them and scold them . . . ." To believe in somebody else is to recognize their rights as an individual, even when that involves criticism.

> I like the kids a lot, because they are very vivacious . . . and I like it if they scold me when I arrive late [she lives very far]. I allow them to criticize

> me, to tell me that I cannot do this or that . . . . Sometimes I tell them that they must stay on until one o'clock [they normally leave at noon]. They may say no to this, "we will leave when the bell rings!" I like it if the children are not afraid, if they respond, if they question.

Obviously, to allow children to voice their opinion and even to criticize denotes a sense of professional security. In fact, senora Rosa appeared to be convinced that her acts were important both for the children as well as for the school. Her pupils' also appreciated this attitude. We asked an 11-year-old boy whether he liked school.

> *Boy:* Yes, of course, I can do many things!
> *Interviewer:* What?
> *Boy:* Well . . . I can play, learn, read, laugh, play.
> *Interviewer:* How do you do all that? Doesn't your teacher scold you?
> *Boy:* Miss? No, she is always very good. She can also laugh; she tells us we have to talk and "be yourselves, that's why you're here, to be yourselves," and I'm like that.
> *Interviewer:* Does your teacher know your parents?
> *Boy:* My mother, yes; my dad is not here, he is working in Alto Beni.
> *Interviewer:* Does she speak much to your mom?
> *Boy:* My teacher?
> *Interviewer:* Yes.
> *Boy:* Yes, she had gone to my house and asked to come to study [referring to the literacy lessons].
> *Interviewer:* And do you like it if your mom comes to learn?
> *Boy:* With my teacher, yes; with others, no!
> *Interviewer:* Why not with others?
> *Boy:* Because the others are bad.

This boy's judgment was simple and concrete: teachers are "good" or "bad." In this statement, he seemed to encompass a whole gamut of feelings and experiences. He wanted his mother to partake of his own experience with the good teacher and not of those with other teachers, which might have made her unhappy.

Senora Rosa's views about success and failure, discipline, and how knowledge should be conveyed underscore her view of the role of schooling. On the one hand, she acknowledged that a child's success in school is largely conditioned by his or her home background.

> Lack of food, cultural environment as many children have no other books than those texts they use in school nor do they learn much other than what we tell them at school; they don't even have the chance of going to the zoo.

On the other hand, she acknowledged that teachers were also at fault. A child is not necessarily a failure if he does not do his homework, especially if after school he "must go out to work." Children do not fail because of not having completed schooling on account of personal or economic reasons. There are no failures, as long as children in school have been considered as individuals and there has been an effort to provide them with the necessary basic skills. Therefore, diplomas and prizes are also no indication of success.

> . . . no, because that good pupil with prizes may have come with all that is needed to make him a good pupil: memory, intelligence. But the child without prizes might be an excellent person, who reflects more but does

> not respond in examinations as we require him to, that is, by rote repetition; or it may be that we do not understand the way in which he understands things. Discipline in school, is not just to form lines, to remain silent; it is not to have children sitting still without moving. I think that children's orderly participation in class, that they talk, that they converse among themselves — that is discipline — and I think we have attained a bit of that

Senora Rosa's views on this matter sharply contrasted with what we saw in other classrooms and with what we heard other teachers say.

> Discipline is that pupils obey their teacher when they are told to stop talking, to be seated, to be quiet. When I give my explanations, the class must be completely silent. When I notice somebody who is talking I ask him a question . . . in order to maintain discipline.

To ensure that her children gain something while going through school (for whatever time that might be), senora Rosa tried to plan her work carefully; this was a general school practice.

> We plan weekly, but also for each topic and we consider the children's needs that we diagnosed at the beginning of the year; we also carry out a general diagnosis . . . and I think that now the kids in my class more or less know what they need and they even ask to learn some topics. For example, when we spoke about breathing and the digestive system many wanted to know about sicknesses, how they can be cured, how they can be avoided.

In the best of pedagogic tradition, senora Rosa also knew what she would like her children to attain.

> For me, in maths, I think that it's important that they learn the basic operations and, in language, that they learn to write, that they be able to write compositions, to summarize; that they learn to read the newspaper and for this we have worked a lot with clippings.

Effects

We continued to visit Pampahasi for 1 year after concluding the observations that form the basis of this chapter. Senora Rosa's children were all promoted and there were no drop outs. In this respect, however, the school rates also were low: 14 of 84 1st-year pupils and 9 of 64 2nd-year pupils dropped out and there were only 4 repeaters in the 2nd year. These values are important only as an external criterion of success for the school and for senora Rosa's pupils; what really should be considered are the aims senora Rosa had set for her children. Had she achieved what she hoped for?

During our 2nd year of observation, we encountered several changes in the school. There were now more teachers, so senora Rosa no longer had to teach 2 years together in one group plus a third group. She taught only 1st year. Her former pupils had other teachers. We observed the new 4th-year class comprising her old 3rd-year pupils. We found the children suggesting topics for discussion and addressing their teacher with relative ease; this, in turn, was stimulating the teacher to respond with equal ease. Pupils sat in a square in the room and had no difficulty in quickly forming groups when requested. They were not afraid of talking occasionally to each other or of occasionally voicing dissatisfaction to something their new teacher said. Although the teacher in this class used a style that presumably had not altered since she left Normal School, she did not force a rigid disciplinarian atmosphere upon the class. In this, she let herself be guided by the children's own behaviour.

Those pupils of senora Rosa who were now in the 5th grade exhibited a similar behaviour to that of the 4th-year class. They were able to easily handle group activities and were setting the pace for a relaxed and communicative atmosphere between teacher and pupils. They did not shy from questioning, a fact that pleased the new teacher to the extent that she confessed herself to be "happy with my children because they are different from the others."

The new teachers at this school were also, in a way, exceptional. They were more politically committed than previous teachers, and this may explain their openness to pupil participation in the teaching process. However, they were also less preoccupied with everyday teaching issues and more vocal on macrosocial problems. Unfortunately, this was becoming a source of tension within the school.

A Postscript

The teacher described in this chapter behaved differently; her headmaster and, to a certain extent, the whole school were also different. We were at ease in this school. The anguish that we shared with the children of other schools was gone.

The school of Pampahasi had begun to break away from tradition and function on the basis of a different educational philosophy. Children here were allowed to acknowledge themselves as individuals, to engage in productive group activities, and to experience the importance of their own contribution to the learning process; but for how long would they be able to do so? Would the children or their teachers be allowed to continue or would they even want to continue when having to face the inevitable clash with the external system? For it is the external system that sets the frame within which the teachers and the students must move and, indeed, the frame is very limited. It imposes bureaucratic structures that require acquiescence if promotion is ever to be achieved, work conditions that are taxing on the teacher both physically and mentally, and primary-school salaries that are close to those of an unskilled worker. In addition, there is a sense of frustration that overcomes a teacher who is not necessarily moved by high ideals and who has chosen her profession as a means of social ascent. In fact, instead of the bright, socially alert children of the middle class, she has to teach children from social groups considered the lowest and most alien: the Aymaras, the Quechuas, and other sectors of the poor population.

The teacher and school we have described were different not only because of their care for the children but also because of their appreciation for Aymara cultural values. In an interview, the school head teacher expressed this understanding.

> Yes, I am happy. From the time I began as a teacher I tried to contribute to education and to carry out an effective work.

> Especially as regards the poor communities, I feel I am able to adapt to their situation, perhaps because I come from that culture, so to say, I am able to adapt. I can converse, I can even speak the native language.
>
> The children of my school are humble, yes, they are poor. They are Aymaras, humble, almost without discipline problems; they are not rebels, they are peaceful. In a way they are different from the city children who seem to lack motivation; the children here are not like that.

With changes that to others might seem minimal, such as the encouragement of group activities, this school had recognized the natural communitarian structure of the Aymara Indians as well as the sense of loss that the children experience when they leave the safety of their community to go to school in the city. The most striking aspect of this study was discovering that the children who learned to be themselves one year continued to be so the next year by "forcing," in a sense, their experience of school life (learning, working, and playing together) on the new teacher. This, however, given all that we had seen in other schools, constituted a break from tradition in Bolivian society, where schools for the poor are to provide only a taste of the higher culture. Our concluding reflections, therefore, led us to wonder how successful senora Rosa or any other teacher might be in achieving a lasting break with tradition.

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7

School Failure: Who is Responsible?

Gabriela Lopez, Jenny Assael, and Elisa Neumann

Children who fail in school are "no-one's land," a teacher was heard to say. Neither school, nor teachers, nor parents take responsibility for failure. Often the child is blamed for his or her defeat or the causes are traced to social problems that can only be solved when distant utopias come into being.

In this chapter, we narrate our attempts to search the school environment for the circumstances and conditions connected with school failure. We have understood school failure to be the process whereby a child desists from complying with school requirements for learning and behaviour and is eventually punished by the system (through examination failure or repetition of the school year). We have assumed that within the school and especially in the teaching relationships, there are situations that, if described and reflected upon, will help to detect the origins of and the processes whereby children are classified as successes or failures. We have also assumed that such classifications are related to underlying interpretations that social and school actors ascribe to "school failure" and that poor children do not fail only because they are poor (although their chances of succeeding are less).

We carried out our study in four 1st-year classrooms of two primary schools in the city of Santiago, Chile. Both were located in and received students from working-class areas. During the entire school year, we looked "ethnogaphically" at the structure of the schools, their people, and their events. We talked to parents, children, and teachers; we observed the development of lessons, life in the playground, and took part in parent–teacher meetings. As time wore on, we focused on those children who were initially part of an undifferentiated group but later emerged as potential "school failures," and we tried to understand why this had happened. Throughout the study, we paid special attention to the teachers, as they appeared clearly responsible for the structure and conduct of the teaching–learning processes within the classroom.

After examining a mountain of notes and interpreting these accounts, we recognized that a child's decision to opt out, however conscious, was an important factor in that child's failure. Failure is imminent when the child perceives himself or herself as being unable to work successfully. How does this perception arise? What is the role, in this respect, of school and home experiences as they relate to learning performance? How are these experiences shaped through the perceptions and activities of the various people involved in the process of schooling? We attempt to give some descriptive response to these questions in this chapter. To that end, we selected some noticeable events embedded in the classroom teaching practices and considered parents', teachers', and children's perceptions regarding success and failure. We also examined the process of attribution of responsibility for school failure as we were able to understand it from each actor's words and actions.

Construction of School Failure

One way of looking at "school failure" is to liken it to a yardstick held by those in charge of the educational process. As performance is assessed and measured, a child's position in the success-failure scale is determined by his or her placement along this yardstick. The school system in Chile has a definition of failure that, for the 1st year of primary school, emphasizes school attendance and fulfillment of stated objectives: to read, to write, and to perform basic arithmetical operations. Failure is interpreted by the system as the inability to fulfil such objectives, which is due either to structural deficiencies that require specialized attention or to a personal lack of effort, being, therefore, punishable. To determine where the problem lies, the Chilean system requires the school to send a failing child to a diagnostic centre (especially set up by the Ministry of Education for assessing the nature of learning difficulties). The report produced by the centre may indicate the need for placement in a special school or a remedial class, or determine that the child is normal and that the observed difficulties are of a "personal" nature.

Failure as interpreted by the teachers in our study was defined in several ways:

- In contrast to meanings assigned to "good" students:

> A "good" student is one who works, who responds, who participates, who is not a piece of furniture but a happy child who can be motivated and who is enthusiastic.
>
> My good student is one who is not just a "bookworm," but one who shows interest, who investigates, who wants to learn more than what is taught, who not only learns by rote what is taught but who always searches for more, and who is responsible.

- As deficiencies in cognitive and behavioural patterns because of socio-economic or genetic factors:

> There is a hereditary factor, a birth factor, and the cultural environment surrounding poverty . . . .
>
> There are irreversible consequences of food problems that affect a child . . . . Most of the children here have come to school without having had enough food . . . . I believe that their learning problems are due to lack of food.
>
> Claudio is stiff handed, he finds everything difficult . . . he can't use his fingers to do plastic modeling, but he watches everything that the others do . . . . What can one do with a case like this, can you tell me what to do?

- As the level of parental cooperation with the school:

> . . . because there are parents who only come to school on registration day and then again at the end of the year. They never look at their child's

> notebook. A successful child is the one whose parents check every day on what he does, talk to him, require explanations for those things that are not clear to them. We need their cooperation . . . and to make efforts together in order to form habits in the children. Because the greatest problem one has is how to form habits.

Thus, the key words or phrases associated with the teachers' concept of success were "responsible," "eager to learn," "intelligent," "has more culture," and has "parents who care for his or her success." Parents, however, interpreted failure as being linked to poor school reports and poor marks.

> I always try to stimulate . . . . Yes, I pay 10 pesos for the VG [very good] marks on tests, but don't pay for G [good] or S [average] marks.

> He once came back with a bad mark. So I told him: listen Luis, that mark is not good. You should not get those marks. If you do, you will repeat. It never happened again. He is careful!

> When he gets a good mark I kiss him; I show I am happy; he is also happy and proud.

Throughout our observations, it was easy to see how the various concepts of failure were represented throughout the interaction processes between children, teachers, and parents and, in particular, how some classroom practices reinforced the nature of such conceptions. To illustrate the way in which we saw failure being constructed, we have selected for discussion two situations that refer to widespread classroom practices. The first is what teachers call "dictation." The second is the type of teacher classification of pupils that, in relevant literature, is refered to as "labeling."

Dictation

Practically all Chilean primary schools use dictation as a means of teaching children to write and to spell, and as a mode of assessing pupil learning. In this respect, the teachers we observed were no different.

> I have dictation everyday; especially when I teach them a new letter I immediately have a dictation . . . . How else would they learn, if I don't do this?

In three of the classrooms observed, however, dictation was a tedious activity recognized as such not only by some of the children but also by their teachers.

> Around this time [end of the year], what pupils are mostly bored of is dictation. They are fed up because we have had so much of this. It's as if they were tired.

Dictation was not only tedious, it was also a tension- and anxiety-producing experience. The way in which dictation took place usually involved the teacher calling a pupil to the board, dictating words letter by letter, and often reacting very rapidly to the performance. Such reaction would consist of sentences such as "Very good," "Go back to your seat and pay more attention to what you are doing," or "What? Don't tell me you don't know that letter" (an indication that the child had performed wrongly). The atmosphere surrounding dictation was tense; for some pupils, it was a downgrading experience.

Pedro had been told so often during dictation that his "hand was not loose enough," that dictation had become a frustrating experience.

> *Pedro:* Dictations never work with me [sad tone].
> *Interviewer:* Yes, why is that?
> *Pedro:* Because . . . I told you, because my hand isn't very loose [almost angry tone].

Jorge was a child who suffered from an extreme fear of dictation. Three months after the beginning of the year, Jorge still arrived at school crying. His initial and almost unnoticed shy tears gave way to downright shouting at the school entrance. Aggressively, he would try to avoid entering the school and his "scandalous behaviour" was noticed by other parents as they delivered their children to school. Jorge began to reject school. He was not yet considered a "failure" child but only a nervous and awkward pupil. Why did Jorge cry? The initial explanation of his teacher was

> It's because he is like that. He get's nervous when he doesn't bring his homework or is missing something. He cries every day. His parents are very old. He is an only child.

Toward the end of the year, the teacher had characterized the situation more specifically: "Jorge cried because he was reminded of dictation." This fear of Jorge, however, was interpreted as a product of parental attitudes toward him.

> He was influenced by the way his parents dealt with him. I often saw his mother hit him in order to force him to enter the school.

Jorge's mother, however, saw things differently.

> Jorge started in June this year to have problems. It began with the problem of dictation. Dictation, dictation . . . nobody could get him away from that! At first, when it was time to go to school . . . he would start to cry saying he did not want to go to school "because we will have dictation and I will get things wrong." I told the teacher this but she "Don't worry!" But something must have happened because he suddenly did not want to go to school on account of the dictation, not because of reading or arithmetic. I think he may have had problems with dictation and may have been severely reprimanded, and he is so sensitive. He must have been frightened; why did he suddenly have this problem? . . . He would cry all the way to school. He would get off the bus, cross the street, and start pulling me back saying "I don't want to go, I don't want to go," all this scandal on the street! He would throw himself on the pavement . . . . The teacher will never acknowledge that it may have been her fault, because there was another little girl who was experiencing the same thing; she was usually told off by the teacher in a very abrupt manner: "I'm telling you, you are lazy because you are not studious . . . ." This is why I think the same thing has happened to Jorge and as all children are not the same, this one gets more frightened. Here [at home] he did his dictation; my husband helped him every morning. He would ask "Daddy, dictate to me . . . ." It was perfectly correct when he did it and yet he thought it would be wrong. I talked to the teacher hoping to find out what was wrong and she told me he was nervous. They gave me the name of a doctor and I took him to see her. She is treating him . . . . She gave him a tranquillizer. Thanks to God he is improving! The dictations are excellent! It was just the dictation that caused it all. It was the dictation, the dictation, the dictation! I was sick of it all . . . . In

September, the doctor increased the dosage to be taken before going to school.

We asked Jorge about his own views on the subject.

Interviewer: Are you still having the medicine?
Jorge: Yes.
Interviewer: What is the medicine for?
Jorge: To . . . to . . . so that I stop coughing so much. To stop me from crying.
Interviewer: How was it that you stopped crying?
Jorge: Because they gave me a syrup.
Interviewer: Did you cry because you were sad?
Jorge: No! because I was afraid.
Interviewer: What were you afraid of?
Jorge: Dictations, but afterwards it went away.

Among his classmates, Jorge was noted for his odd behaviour.

Pamela: Jorge used to make a fuss. He would throw the teacher's bag around, he would make a fuss, cry, answer his mother back, without respect, without anything. Now he is quiet, he comes in quietly.
Interviewer: Why do you think he did such things?
Pamela: Because he thought there would be reading or dictation and he didn't want to come in because sometimes he didn't know . . . .

Reading was similar in its effect to dictation.

Juanita: When the teacher asks me about the lesson, she scolds me.
Interviewer: What happens when she scolds you?
Juanita: I'm afraid.
Interviewer: Do you go on reading?
Juanita: No!
Interviewer [to another student]: Do you like to read?
Mario: Sometimes . . . very few times. It is very boring.
Interviewer: You say you don't like to study because it's boring.
Mario: Because the words I say don't come out well.

Mario's mother told us "He acts very nervous when the teacher asks him about the lesson. He cannot respond well. It's not the same when I review the lesson with him alone, here." The longer these situations were experienced as threatening by the children, the more difficult it became for them to develop sufficient self-confidence to attempt their work successfully.

Labeling practices

As the year progressed, we were able to observe how teachers (and others) began to classify pupils according to their behavioural patterns and to provide them with various labels. In keeping with the self-fulfilling prophecy, we were able to see how a labeled child reinforced the behaviour implied by the label and appeared to internalize a self-image that accorded with that label. Thus, children referred to as lazy behaved lazily and encouraged the rest of their classmates and their teachers to treat them as being lazy. Among the labels we heard, there were those that clearly led to the erosion of self-image and self-esteem, and ostensibly affected a pupil's learning.

Labeling or nicknaming was found to some degree in all but one of the classes we observed: e.g., weeping Jorge *(Jorge lloron),* Ximena, the thief *(ladrona)*, conceited Miguel *(arrogante)*, baby Tomas *(guagua)*, absent-minded Juan *(pajaron)*, and smelly Eduardo *(hediondo)*. These labels were sufficiently public as to be shared by parents, children, and other teachers, although it was not always clear where they had originated. For example, as a teacher was telling us about Eduardo, whom she referred to as being smelly and dirty ("they send him everyday to school dirty"), we heard another boy shout to him, "Hey, what are you doing smelly one?" When we interviewed Eduardo he told us "They call me *piojento*" (someone who has lice). Eduardo eventually failed his first grade and had to repeat the year.

Jose was called the egg headed and his teacher told us

> Oh, these children! The poor egg-headed kid! Once we called his mother because he had been hit and had a big bruise. His mother came and told me "It's because my child is called egg headed." I was very sad when I heard this, because here we all call him egg headed. Teacher [X] gave him that name and it stayed with him.

The pencil-box fool

Carlos was considered to be a lazy boy because he did nothing. Throughout the year, he was referred to as lazy and in other pejorative ways by both his teacher and his classmates. At the beginning of the year, Carlos possessed all his school utensils and worked during lessons using his exercise books and textbooks; he also dutifully did his homework. By early June (3 months after the beginning of the year), however, his teacher told us that Carlos was a boy with problems. Also by then, the other children knew that Carlos was "lazy." Carlos denied this vigorously.

> *Interviewer* [to Carlos]: Are you lazy?
> *Carlos:* No!
> *Vanessa* [to the observer]: Carlos is lazy because he does nothing!
> *Carlos:* Those are lies!

On the same day that Carlos' teacher told us that he had problems, she signaled him out to the class as not having brought his coloured pencils and as always having to borrow them from other students.

> *Jorge* [to the observer]: Carlos doesn't have coloured pencils.
> *Teacher* [hearing this]: That's because the mothers of these children don't buy them their coloured pencils.

We had noticed, however, that Carlos was a shy child and that, generally, he did not borrow anything from his classmates. We also had noticed that his position in the classroom was such that he could not see the board very well without leaning right over the table.

Carlos had also received other labels: "Charlie Chaplin" and the "pencil-box fool" (the reference to Chaplin in Chilean slang indicates an irresponsible or nonresponsive attitude to requirements and circumstances).

> [The teacher walks to Carlos' table. She looks at his notebook and sees that he has not written anything.]
> *Teacher:* Again you have done nothing, Carlos. You are acting like Chaplin [*te achaplinaste*], Carlos.
> [Carlos looks at her with a tense, fixed gaze and says nothing.]
> *Teacher* [to the observer]: Carlos is on strike, he won't do anything.
> *Another student:* Charlie Chaplin!

> *Teacher:* His name is not Chaplin; we call him Chaplin because he acts like Chaplin [*se achaplina*].
> *German* [comes up to the teacher]: Carlos is not doing anything; he is bothering!
> *Teacher:* What are you doing Carlos?
> *German:* He is playing with his pencil box.
> *Teacher:* If that's so then he's not bothering you. Go and sit down, German!

In an interview Carlos' mother told us

> He had a Superman pencil box, maybe you saw it. One day he came home and told me that the teacher had called him the pencil-box fool, that he was the pencil-box fool. When I asked him again about this, he said that the teacher had told the other children: "Here is the pencil-box fool."

When we talked to Carlos, he told us that his classmates had broken his pencil box.

> *Interviewer:* And what did they say about the pencil box?
> *Carlos:* They said . . . they called me the pencil-box fool.

Regardless of who initially gave him this label (Carlos told us it had been his mother), the important fact was that it was used in the classroom.

School was an unfriendly place for Carlos. As the weeks went by, he began to retreat and sit at his desk without responding to the teaching requirements. He was tense and always sat on the edge of his chair as if ready to jump up and go. He bit his nails, sucked his thumb, and, toward the end of the year, sucked his whole hand. Our notes between the end of June and the beginning of October point to the change that was taking place.

> 23 June
> *Teacher:* Close your books for a while and look here!
> [Carlos obeys and closes his book immediately.]
>
> 11 August
> *Teacher* [to observer]: Carlos is behaving terribly; yesterday, for example, he was sitting at his desk and began to go red. After a while I asked what was wrong, but he did not answer. He wanted to go to the toilet but did not want to ask for permission.
>
> 6 September
> [Carlos is silent; at times he looks up at the teacher. Most of the time he leans his head on the table hugging his books and things.]
>
> 6 October
> [Carlos plays with the chair; does not look at the book, does not take part in the questioning-answering sequences that the teacher conducts.]

Obviously, Carlos' teacher was finding it difficult to cope with him.

> Sometimes one feels defeated when one sees that the children don't learn. For example, I feel terribly disappointed when I realize there is nothing I can do with Carlos. I don't know what to do! I despair, I search, I think, but of no avail. One also needs help from the home and if it is not there, then there's nothing one can do about the child.

Carlos was sent to a diagnostic centre and when his report came back to the teacher, she understood it to mean that Carlos' deficiencies and limitations would not allow him to perform like other children, or, at least, that they were limitations she did not think she could deal with. She had not completely written him off, however.

> He is not dumb, so I think it is good for him to repeat the year . . . . He will be more mature; he will be able to learn, though he will never be a bright student.

Carlos had an unfortunate family background. His parents seemed to have separated, the family lived in one room, and there was not enough money for basic needs. His father was unemployed and did not contribute to the support of Carlos or his mother. His mother worked for the Minimum Employment Programme and earned about USD 100 per month. Carlos' school experiences were also bad. By the end of the year, he had not only indicated a rejection of school but also of his mother, whom he seemed to consider responsible for his school problems. To make matters worse, as his school situation deteriorated, Carlos' mother blamed the teacher and refused to comply with various school requirements. This further reinforced Carlos' poor standing in school.

In September, Carlos' mother decided that he should repeat the year and planned to transfer him to another school; however, Carlos remained in school to the end of the year (December). His self-image by then was that of a "lazy" child: "It's because I watch so much tele. Nobody wants to play with me because I'm lazy."

Ximena, the thief

Not only was Ximena lazy because she did nothing, but she was also called a thief. Quite spontaneously, Ximena was in the habit of taking fruit and other things from her classmates. Her teacher told us about this habit.

> She is a terrible child. She does terrible things! Yesterday there was a circus here at the school. One child brought a packet of biscuits, a big one, to eat while he watched the circus. Ximena somehow managed to enter the room and to take the biscuits as well as a ticket from the circus from another pupil. When asked if she was responsible for this, she showed me the crumbs still left in the bag and acknowledged that she had taken the biscuits. She does not deny these acts. The other day, in front of everybody, she took a banana from another boy's bag and ate it.

Ximena was treated as a failure student and it is not clear if this was due to her habit of stealing or whether the habit developed as a result of her frustrated school experiences. The following excerpt from a teaching interaction illustrates the type of experiences that Ximena was often subjected to.

> *Teacher:* Ximena, come here!
> [Ximena walks to the chalkboard and is asked to write a number. She is left handed. She writes the number 2 and the teacher tells her it is wrong.]
> *Ximena:* Four!
> *Teacher:* All right, four!
> [Ximena writes the number 4 slowly with her left hand. The teacher puts a plus sign next to the number and Ximena writes 3 instead of the 1 that was required.]
> *Teacher:* That's not a one. What number is that?
> *Other children* [in chorus]: Three!
> *Teacher* [with bothered tone]: Go on, then, write 1.

> [Ximena looks at the board and does not write anything; a few seconds transpire.]
> *Teacher:* Sit down and watch what someone else does!
> [Several children shout "I," "I."]
> *Teacher:* Maruja, you are so quiet! Come here!
> [Maruja goes to the chalkboard and the teacher holds her hand as she attempts to write the number 1. However, she writes the number reversed.]
> *Teacher:* No, that number is reversed.
> [She erases it and then holds Maruja's hand and helps her to write the number 5 which is the correct result of 4 + 1.]

It was obvious that Maruja and Ximena received different treatments: one experienced a caring type of help; the other, rejection.

Ximena left school around the middle of the year. Her teacher told us that this was due to her mother's problems at home; she was not able to care for the girl and had thus decided to send Ximena away to live with an aunt. From other parents, however, we heard that the girl had been transferred to another school because of her difficulties with the teacher.

Recovery

When Jorge stopped crying, he was freed from his nickname, *el lloron* (the weeper). His mother worked with him on the notion that he was a capable boy and could perform well during dictation. Jorge spoke of his teacher with affection: "I love you . . . I like to come school . . . and I am learning, am I not?" As she acknowledged these feelings, Jorge's teacher extracted from him the promise that "I will never cry again!"

Most of the children who had been labeled pejoratively were not able, like Jorge, to recover their sense of self-esteem and, as we have seen, ended up leaving the school or remaining there but being uninvolved in its activities.

> *Interviewer:* Does your teacher like you?
> *Luis:* No!
> *Interviewer:* Why?
> *Luis:* Because I'm ugly!
> *Interviewer:* Did she tell you that?
> [Luis nods affirmatively.]
> *Interviewer:* Do you think it's true?
> *Luis:* I *am* ugly!

Luis progressively repudiated both his school and teacher; as his mother explained

> He first wanted to be taken out of school. He did not want to be with auntie Miriam [reference to the teacher]. He insisted on that for a long time . . . around the middle of the year he wanted to be changed from school. Maybe this affected him, because from then on he began to fail.

Family and school

The quality of parent–school relationships (which, in the case of the schools observed, was primarily mother–teacher) appeared to be a very important factor of the children's degree of success. We found that children who failed their 1st year had parents who, as judged by teachers, in general, did not relate "appropriately" to the school.

Parents and teachers face each other with a set of mutual demands and attribution of responsibility regarding a child's school attainment. The schools we observed required from parents cooperation ranging from material contributions to help in the actual teaching process. Parents, however, expected teachers to solve most of their children's learning problems.

Through the analysis of interviews and the observation of parent–teacher meetings, we came to the conclusion that school and home were, in fact, two culturally different worlds that did not always meet. On one side was the school, with its specific concept of learning; on the other side were families, with their working-class experience of life. We found that teachers often could understand neither the value system nor the logic displayed by their children's parents and tended to downgrade their way of life. The school possessed its own views of what was needed to be a "good pupil" and a "good parent." For example, the teachers in our study considered that parent educational level was crucial to their children's education. This, it was felt, was especially important in the 1st year, when teachers expected parents to help with the teaching of reading and writing.

> *A mother* [referring to the teacher's expectations]: She told me I had to be in charge of teaching how to read . . . . He is slow in reading because the teacher considers that it is not her obligation to teach him how to read, to check his lessons . . . .

As can be surmised, only parents with a higher educational level were able to provide their children the kind of help the school expected of them. Those parents who were unable to do so, especially those with children who were experiencing learning difficulties, were considered inadequate by the teachers. Perceiving such rejection, these parents resorted to indifference and remained away from the school. One of the mothers told us about her relationship with the teacher.

> All they tell me is that he is dirty, that he loses his pencils. He leaves the house clean, bur arrives [in school] dirty, [with his clothes] torn. This is why I feel ashamed and do not go near her [the teacher].
>
> I have not told her anything. She does not lead me to sincere myself. I am very reserved, what is mine is mine; it's mine, that's all. She's saying all the time that my child is dirty; I feel less willing to talk to her.
>
> I will not go to the meeting. I know they will protest and all that. But, however, what happens is that I have not paid the fees. As soon as one gets there they start to ask for money. I don't have any money. They say "But how is it that she doesn't have 20 pesos." But, I don't and moreover I have not paid at all this year. One feels ashamed to have to give so many explanations.

For the schools in our study, "good parents" were those who cooperated submissively with the school; i.e., good parents paid their fees on time, took part in voluntary activities requested by the school, questioned the teacher about their children's progress, helped or, if necessary, forced the children to learn, provided or bought school utensils, and so on. A "trouble-making" parent was one who did none of these things, one who attempted to undermine the teacher's reputation by facing up to or criticizing her, or one who was "insolent" or rude.

The teachers considered the educational level of the parent to be crucial to their children's education.

> *Teacher* [talking at a parent–teacher meeting]: There are parents who cause problems. They always let the Executive do everything, mothers who do not collaborate. This can't be, they must cooperate in some form.
>
> *Teacher:* Parents are difficult! One said she would ask her husband to come and deal with the teacher. Parents are very rude nowadays. They even denounce a colleague. Imagine this! They are very difficult, and not only in this class; the year C teacher had an awful thing happen to her . . . .

As we observed the parents' relationships to the school over the school year, we noticed that whenever such a relationship deteriorated, so did the children's attainment. Within the teaching context, the pupils involved were then ostracized, reinforcing, in some cases, their parents' negative attitude. Thus, we found a vicious circle that enveloped and affected the children. In contrast, those parents who understood and accepted the school's explicit message about what their attitude should be tended to have children who did well in school. Looking more closely at the parents' or, more specifically, at the mothers' mode of relating to the school, we noticed three different attitudes.

Submissive mother

Mario was a 1st-year child who came from a very poor and illiterate family of indigenous *(mapuche)* extraction. Not only had Mario not attended preschool, but he had also enrolled in school after the rest of the children. He was a quiet child and was considered to be well behaved. Around the middle of the school year, his teacher declared that he was lagging behind, that "he had not learned anything."

Mario's mother always visited the school and maintained a good relationship with the teacher. She did everything the school required from her and, in status, placed herself below the teacher: "The teacher knows best." We detected this attitude through talking to the teacher and hearing how she dealt with Mario's mother.

> I told her that not only should she care for Mario, but his father should do it also; they should not only help him with this homework but should also come to meetings and visit the school regularly in order to find out about the child's progress. I made her understand . . . .

Mario's mother also told us "The teacher is very good! All the teachers like me. That is why I am happy with them."

It was this type of relationship, it seemed to us, that incited the teacher to pay special attention to Mario. She helped him individually and called on the rest of the class to help him out. Thus, Mario was the only student is his class who, after a correct performance at the chalkboard, was applauded by his classmates. He also benefited from teacher attention after class time. Toward the end of the year, the teacher told us "I find he has learned a lot; but, of course, I have had to keep him by my side a lot, every day. But he has already moved ahead."

Aggressive mother

Carlos, the child for whom the teacher could do nothing, had a different type of mother. As perceived by the teacher

> . . . the cases of Carlos and Mario are different. Although illiterate, Mario's mother and father care about him. She says to me: "Senorita, I want him to learn . . . ." and fortunately she helps him. But with Carlos it's different. His mother does not bother at all about Carlos' things, nor about his work. She does not care!

As perceived by Carlos' mother

> I consider that in school he is not taken at all into account . . . . At first, I thought this teacher was good. But that's not so! If she sees other children move ahead, she should help those that are lower down, help those that lag behind.

We noted an almost insurmountable conflict between teacher and mother as time went by. As referred to earlier, the teacher perceived Carlos' mother as someone unconcerned about her child and resented her lack of collaboration with the teaching-learning activities, both in terms of not buying what he needed and not helping him with his work. In turn, Carlos' mother refused to participate in school activities because she felt the school was not offering adequate help to her boy.

> What I don't like is when they begin with their demands for money. That's about as much as I can take, because if they were conscious of what the situation [economic] is they would not be asking money for this and that. On top of that, I am not receiving any benefit from the teacher; at present, I am not receiving anything from her, she doesn't even care for the boy. If she helped me with the boy, well, I would give money, but not like this.

Because Carlos' mother did not pay the parent's association fee, sell tickets for the school fete, or pay her dues for other festivities, Carlos was prevented from participating in school events such as Mother's Day or the End-of-School Day. Thus, Carlos ended up in an awkward situation both at school and at home. He was isolated from routine and special activities in school and his classmates did not play with him because he was considered "lazy." He suffered because he had no pencils; his mother refused to buy them because she was annoyed at the school's lack of concern for the child. As previously mentioned, Carlos failed his 1st year and was asked to repeat.

Shrewd mother

Tomas' mother had a similar type of relationship with the school as that of Carlos' mother. She was considered a rude troublemaker and formed part of the group of parents who criticized the parent–teacher association leadership. At one of their meetings, we heard her confront both the chairperson and the teacher in a very strong and direct manner. She later explained the grounds for her reaction at that meeting.

> I heard from other children that the teacher says that he [Tomas] and Carlos are lazy. They will not get anywhere . . . that lazy ones do not get anywhere. I find that what the teacher is doing with him is very wrong. If anybody is to punish him it should be me or his father, because in that way he would not reject the teacher, because, as it is, she frightens him. I consider that she does not care for the boy as she ought to. If the boy does not get on well in school, she should concern herself . . . .

In spite of her feelings, this mother eventually realized that her attitude was causing even more problems for her boy. She recalled to us her own experience as a child.

> One cannot go against the teacher! When I was in school I was told that the teacher is always right. Why? I was always sent to the head teacher's office because I argued with the teacher; know I'm very arrogant. I was very arrogant. I always argued back so that my parents had to be sent for. In the 1st year I did not like the Spanish teacher; I went against her. I was the only one that suffered as a result, because when things come to the crunch it is one who suffers.

Around October (3 months before the end of the school year), Tomas' mother stopped criticizing the teacher in front of other parents. She resigned herself to the fact that Tomas would repeat the year; she did not make any demands on him, but continued to send him to school. Around the same time, the teacher began to change her attitude toward Tomas; she nagged him less and helped him with some of his work. Tomas, in turn, after having lived in a world of his own, with very little interaction with the teacher and the other children, began to emerge from this isolation and move into the class mainstream, improving his work at school. Unfortunately, however, this change came too late and Tomas was not able to fulfill the objectives laid out for 1st year by the Ministry of Education.

Referral to diagnostic centres

After a few weeks of observing their pupils' progress, the teachers had reached some decision about who they considered was performing adequately and who was lagging behind. Problem children were classified as either salvageable, i.e., lazy but not stupid, or not salvageable. Carlos, for example, was considered salvageable because his main problem was laziness: "He is not stupid, so I think it is good for him to repeat the year." Salvageable children required extra support from their parents to succeed. Nonsalvageable students, however, needed a closer identification of their problems and specialized attention. The teachers considered themselves unable to deal with these children. Thus, they would refer the "problem" children to a diagnostic centre to establish the nature of their disability or send them to a medical specialist (opthalmologist or speech therapist); however, they did not consider that it was the teacher's or the school's responsibility to make the necessary contacts for the referral. It was the parents' task to arrange the *consulta* (appointment). On the whole, parents who were told to do this tried to get an appointment; often, however, they had to wait over 3 months for the appointment to materialize. In the meantime, the affected child knew that something was wrong with him and that he should wait to see a "specialist." By then, all those involved, parents, child, and teacher, had entered into a "waiting" condition. The child concerned no longer would be required to work more than what he or she spontaneously wanted to do, i.e., no assignments or homework. If, by chance, such a pupil showed signs of desiring to work like the others, this would neither be acknowledged nor encouraged. Once the teacher had decided that she could not handle the problem, she ceased to concern herself with the child.

The concern of a pupil who finally received a report from the diagnostic centre was to find a place in a special class or school, if such a step had been recommended by the report. Unfortunately, such places are scarce in the city of Santiago, so the children in the classes we visited had to remain in their schools without treatment and were eventually forced to repeat the school year.

Who is Responsible for Failure?

In all the classes except one, we found pupils who were considered failures and who somehow suffered the consequences of such a classification. They either had to drop out of school or repeat the year; often, they had to endure months of isolation within the classroom situation. These failure children were, in turn, surrounded by people who informed them of their standing and often told them that they would not make it. How did these different persons view the issue of responsibility for failure?

Teachers

On the whole, the teachers we talked to felt that the responsibility for school failure was generally linked to the child's family situation. They considered that if a child is having difficulties at school, it is the parents who should take over and help in the learning processes. In the last instance, a child's failure, as teachers considered it, is due to a lack of commitment on the part of the family toward the child and the school. Along these lines, teachers classified families in three types:

- Educative families provide an environment favourable to learning. These parents concern themselves with finding out about the child's progress in school, help with homework, take their child to see specialists if required (diagnostic centre, doctors, therapists), etc.
- Noneducative families do not undertake any task related to the learning needs of their children. These families discharge all their responsibility on the school, do not help the children with their work, and do not comply with the requests of the school.
- Antieducative families, in fact, perturb the child's learning possibilities. These are broken families or families with serious socioeconomic problems. Within these families, children are left to fend for themselves.

As teachers see the issue of responsibility, it is the parents who should come in and help the child who does not adapt to the learning pace established in the classroom. If, when disadaptation begins to take place, parents have not assumed their responsibility, they are labeled as non- or antieducative. Carlos, to whom we referred earlier, came from such a family background. As explained, his teacher felt that there was no help coming from his home and that, therefore, he would have to face his problems alone: "He will learn only what he can grasp in school and through his personal effort, because, at home, no, with his mother, no!" Moreover, Carlos' teacher felt that Carlos' mother was not only unconcerned about his education, but also did not care for him: "I feel very sorry for Carlos, for I have a feeling that he is left alone and abandoned at home." However, this teacher also considered Carlos' mother to be a troublemaker who not only had problems with the teacher, but also with other parents.

> I have the impression that this lady has problems at home, so she comes to chuck all her resentment here; that is why she is resentful. I think she is resentful.

Other children's learning difficulties were also attributed to the home. Pamela, Ximena, Miguel, Jorge, and Tomas were all considered to belong to families that, in differing degrees, were classified as noneducative. Pamela, her teacher told us, had motor and concentration problems and required her mother's help with homework and a better learning environment at home. Ximena was considered to belong to an antieducative family. Her parents were separated and she was in the charge of a "semicrazy servant," while her mother worked. In school, the girl "does nothing," "lies," and "steals" the fruit from her friends. Miguel, however, belonged to an educative family according to his teacher. Although his learning problems were rooted in "problems at home," it was acknowledged that his mother was concerned about how Miguel did at school; she collaborated with the parent–teacher association and engaged a private teacher to help Miguel with his homework. In spite of this effort, however, results were not good. Therefore, the teacher declared this to be a case where specialist help was required, although confessing that perhaps Miguel's mother was somewhat severe with him and did not demonstrate sufficient affection. Jorge, who was not treated properly by his parents, was also judged to be in a similar situation. Tomas' family appeared to represent a typically noneducative case. He received no help at all from his parents and was assessed as being too immature to be able to succeed on his own. Although Mario's family could also be considered antieducative because of their very poor living conditions and the fact that both parents were illiterate, the teacher was sympathetic toward them. This was because Mario's mother, as shown earlier, was compliant with the teacher and did not contradict her.

Parents

Teachers and other school personnel tended to be blamed by some parents for their child's failure. They felt that teachers had not shown sufficient care. The families of Carlos, Pamela, and Tomas declared vehemently that it "was the teacher who had not been concerned about their progress as she ought to." They felt that it was the school's responsibility to incite children to learn: "You are the teacher and you should know how to find the child's style."

Other parents, however, while acknowledging that they should be doing something to help their children, considered themselves to be handicapped for various reasons. They lacked the *tecnicas* (skills) to deal with special difficulties: "I do help him, but it doesn't work"; "I try my best but he doesn't work"; "I try my best, but he doesn't pay attention." They even felt a certain degree of remorse: "Maybe it's because I am too strict with him."

There were also those parents who declared that a child's problems were of his own doing. "He has a *cabeza dura*" (a blockhead), said Mario's mother, while at the same time asserting her lack of skills to help him: "I told all the teachers that I could not help him because I cannot read." Sometimes events at home made things even more difficult. Miguel's father had died and this affected him more than could be foreseen. His mother considered that this situation plus the fact that he was rebellious, disobedient, and had ran away made it difficult for her to do anything. She did not know how to face the problem and had given up: "I've lost patience. It's finished."

Students

As we considered our interviews with the children, we found that with differing degrees of consciousness, in almost all cases, the children attributed their failure to their own doing. We heard them assert their responsibility when speaking about their obligation to "study and do homework." The children's articulations regarding their responsibility were coloured by the messages received from surrounding adults. Carlos asserted he was born "like that," adding "it's because I watch so much tele," a reason often given by his mother for his failure. In other responses, the influence of teachers could be detected as when they said they "must be responsible" in studying or doing homework, in "bringing their school utensils," or in "carrying out what the teacher says in class."

When faced with all these declarations of self-responsibility on the part of children classified as failures, one cannot help but wonder what the consequences of such perceptions might be on their later lives. These were children between 6 and 7 years of age beginning to face the life of school and already resigned to the fact, as in the case of Carlos, that they had created their own failure.

Classmates

Classmates also appeared to have their view of who was responsible for failing children. They ascribed failure to the problem children themselves: "because they are lazy"; "he does nothing"; "he doesn't bring his coloured pencils"; "he doesn't do his homework"; "the senorita teaches her, but she doesn't understand the things." These children also repeated what they heard adults say: "They are lazy because at home they are not taught, they are not given dictation, they don't do anything." They considered the model child as "orderly and hard working" and applied this label to the best students. To be "lazy" is a "bad example" that should not be imitated; hence, the children should not befriend "lazy ones." Carlos was not only isolated from his teacher and his mother, but found that at school his friends would not play with him. Only once did we perceive any feeling of companionship from one of his mates, Tomas, who also happened to be considered a "lazy" boy.

School Failure and Teachers

Being centred on school events and processes, our research was particularly concerned with the teacher's role in the construction of failure. Although aware that there could be explanations dealing with the various components of school failure, our analysis centred on the importance of the child's perception of his or her ability to learn.

In reviewing our notes and reflections from a year's observation in the four classrooms, we found that children who were eventually told to repeat the year had internalized a picture of themselves as incapable of learning. These children went through initial failure experiences: in writing, their characters were judged to be badly done, they could not recognize numbers properly, and pictures were drawn incorrectly. For these and other reasons, notably difficulties with parents, described throughout this chapter, these children tended to become the subject of labeling practices. They experienced, justifiably or not, a hostile environment at school where normal activities such as learning to read or dictation became a threat and, hence, they were progressively ignored by teachers, isolated by peers, and, in some cases, condemned at home.

Children who failed obviously did not fit the teachers' concept of the "good student." They did not "work," "respond," or "participate," were not "enthusiastic," could not be "motivated," and did not want to "investigate, to learn more than what was taught"; they were "rote" learners and behaved "irresponsibly." After our observations, we wondered whether the teaching practices we saw could have stimulated children to respond to the teachers' definitions of a good student: "A good student is one who works, who responds, who participates, who is not a piece of furniture, but a happy child who can be motivated and who is enthusiastic." The following excerpt was drawn from a lesson that had many elements in common with the kind of teaching we saw in other classes. It suggests that the kind of pupil desired by teachers might have no possibility of development if all teaching were like this sample. In this case, the teacher had alerted the observer beforehand that her's was a very unruly class: "All these children went through preschool, but they developed no habits; they never stop talking, they leave everything lying around, they don't even know how to tie their shoe laces."

A lesson on sets

[The children talk constantly while the teacher tries to organize the lesson environment.]

Teacher: Put away your homework. Just keep your coloured pencils out.

Pat [shouting happily]: Coloured, coloured!

Teacher [to a student]: Put that away because I'm going to give you other materials [she gives out some sheets].

Teacher [to the class]: Put that away because I'm going to pass out other materials . . . . Turn the sheet downwards [she shows how].

Teacher: Does everybody have paper? Danilo, did I give you paper? Now, look here!

[The children are all talking, some turn to talk to a boy in the back.]

Teacher: Ready to begin? Let me see?

Students: Yeeeees!

Teacher: In our last lesson we spoke of universal sets. Rodrigo Pereira . . . . Better, cross your arms!

[Later]

Teacher [explaining]: In our last lesson we spoke of universal sets; a universal set contains all the elements.

Students: Yeeeeeees!

Teacher: You, Fernando! If you don't pay attention you will not know what to do. In our last lesson we drew the vegetable set. Edgardo, you are not paying attention! Danilo, look here! [She turns and draws on the board.]

Teacher: Can we make a subset. Of what?

Students: Fruit!

Teacher: What is there?

Students: Pears and apples.

Teacher: What else?

Students: Trees.

Teacher: What else?

Students: Houses.

Teacher: Now, look here. You have a set; look here Claudia, you are concerned about everything except paying attention!

[The teacher begins to ask the children to call out the names of the elements in the first set.]

Students: Me, me!

[The teacher calls the students' names out.]

Teacher: Rodrigo?

Rodrigo: Ships.

Teacher: Milchor?

Milchor: Fish.

Teacher: All right, fish.

[The teacher corrects because Milchor has said *pescado* meaning caught fish as distinct from *peces* meaning live fish. However, she does not explain the nature of this distinction.]

Teacher: Who can tell me the name of another element?

Students: Me, me!

Teacher: All right, you!

Student: Ships.

Teacher: We have already said that. What other elements?

Student: Shark, shark!

Another student [singing]: *Tiburon, tiburon* [a popular song in Spanish meaning "Shark, shark"].

Teacher: But of this set we will make four subsets.

[The teacher shows a sheet of paper.]

Teacher: Work on your sheet without looking at your neighbour, without talking. Let's see, one can be of ships, of seagulls, of fish, and of anchors.

[The teacher organizes the schoolbag of one of the girls.]

Teacher: We are going to work along. First, put your name on the paper!

Teacher [repeating instructions very quickly]: In the drawing there is a universal set and you must make four subsets of seagulls, ships, anchors and fish. Use black pencil first and then colour it!

[The teacher walks around.]

[The mother of a child comes in with him and explains that he had a *control* (medical appointment) and that now these are more frequent. The teacher comes over to me and tells me: "This is another problem child. He works all right, but I have to be with him all the time." She bangs the table lightly indicating that the children must pay attention. She tells me she will put the child that has just come in next to me so that I can observe him.]

Children who failed experience a hostile environment at school where normal activities become threatening.

[The teacher repeats for the boy's (Oscar) benefit. A girl is talking to someone at the back; she is explaining what has to be done. The teacher walks to her.]

Teacher: Fix your bag! You shouldn't be looking at your neighbour because we have done this many times! Loreto, what do you want?

[The children stop talking. There is silence.]

[Boy talks to girl. Teacher walks by his side and looks at his sheet.]

Teacher [with irritated tone]: Use lead pencil first! Do it with the black lead pencil first.

[The teacher walks to her desk. She then walks around.]

Teacher: Mauricio, do you know why you don't do what you are supposed to do, why you don't pay attention?

Teacher [to the class]: From this universal set of sea things you must make four subsets of ships, seagulls, anchors, and fish.

Teacher [angrily]: Look, there is a child here who is doing trees!

Teacher [to a student]: You are doing another one and you haven't yet finished the first one.

Teacher [to another student]: Michel has it almost ready. Jessica! Alexis!

[Student whistles; Oscar looks up and does not work. The teacher continues to walk around.]

Teacher: What are you missing? How many ships are there?

[Silence.]

Teacher: Have you got an eraser. I'll lend you this one; careful with the paper as it's not very good.

Teacher: Look here for a minute! Below there is another universal set. So do another four subsets; because there are children who have finished. What subsets can we make?

Students: Trees, flowers!

Teacher: And so on.

Oscar: Animals [she turns to another boy]. Boy, I can't do that star!

Sergio [turns and compares Oscar's pencil with his neighbour's]: Look they are the same size!

Teacher [irritated]: Sergio Lizana, work!

[A boy does the drawing for Sergio.]

Observer: Why are you doing his work?

Student: He doesn't know how to do stars.

Teacher [scolding tone]: Danilo use the black pencil! Rodrigo!

[A student stands and the teacher asks whether he has finished.]

Student: I lost my pencil.

Teacher: Look for it.

[Later]

Teacher: Rodrigo, work and sit properly!

[Student gets up and goes to show his work to another boy.]

Teacher [with irritated tone]: Ivan Catalan, work work!

Teacher [goes over to Ivan]: What happened?

[Student shows his sheet of paper.]

Teacher: You've gone out [beyond the lines]. What? You need an eraser?

[She gives him a piece of eraser and he cleans his sheet of paper.]

Oscar: This is difficult!

[Sergio turns and looks at Oscar's anchors.]

Teacher: Sergio Lizana, work!

[Other children continue to talk. Oscar tries to draw the anchors as similarly as possible to the model. He erases several times.]

[A child begins to cry. The teacher comes over to me.]

Teacher: There I have another problem. I don't know what's wrong with this child, he cries for anything. He's crying because his paper is torn.

Teacher [goes over to the student and gives him another sheet of paper]: Take it and be careful!

[One student helps another to do the work.]

[Later]

Sergio [turns]: I think I have finished.

[He shows his sheet to Oscar. He has placed trees in one of the circles that should have sea-related subsets. I ask him why and he tells me it belongs to the lower subset. I tell him it's wrong and he erases it.]

Sergio: Oh, good! What an escape [referring to what might have happened if the teacher had seen it was wrong.]

[He looks at his drawing.]

Sergio: I hadn't put the anchors.

[Later]

Teacher [with angry tone]: Rodrigo Pereira, Mauricio!

[One student explains to another how to do the stars.]

[Later]

Teacher [with an irritated tone]: Ivan Catalan, what are you doing?

Ivan: I'm looking for an eraser.

Teacher: I gave you one before; you've lost it already?

Teacher [angrily]: Andrea, go to your seat. What do you want?

Andrea: An eraser.

Teacher: Can't your neighbour lend you one?

Teacher [to another student]: Sergio Lizana, don't you understand? Did you finish your work? Then work.

Practically all of this lesson was taken up with order motions, with the children clearly not daring to request explanations, and with most of the help needed being given by one child to another. There was no indication of concern for initiative, imagination, or responsibility. The important orders related to, for example, the type of pencil to use and the order of the task (sea subset first, nature subset later). There was evidence of poor management skills resulting in the teacher spending a lot of time dealing with requests from the children for proper materials.

Another of the classes observed, however, had no students classified as failures at the end of the school year. Abstracting from all other conditions that might have contributed to such results, we looked at the teacher's interaction with that class. We observed that she preferred to follow the children's learning pace rather than ensure that objectives be rigidly followed. As she told us

> The school program requires the children to read, but not fluently; it is not necessary for them to recognize all the sounds, they do not have to be fluent until the end of the second grade.

This teacher was equally concerned with acknowledging the children's own modes and needs. More than forcing discipline, she searched for different strategies to use when she observed that her students were not responding as she wanted them to. This might result in having them take a rest or having them go out and play. During lessons, she demonstrated warmth and affection. We never saw her shout or lose her self-control.

> I never use harsh words with the children; it's like an inner thing I have . . . . I have never used a word that might hurt a child.

This teacher indicated that she trusted the children's ability to learn.

> I think my class is an even one. Although there are differences — some are slower than others — all except two cases are salvageable. But what I lack is time because you cannot leave 38 students aside in order to care for 2.

In spite of her saying this, we observed that during the school year she did provide individual attention to those two children who were having difficulties; she worked with them during recreation time or after the classes were over. Juan Carlos was one of these students; he had speech difficulties and could not learn to read. The teacher tried a different reading method and, as often as possible, endeavoured to communicate to him her confidence that he would be able to learn.

> I do not want nor believe that Juan Carlos will repeat the year because he has many good qualities. I think he does have specific learning problems as he constantly forgets what he has learnt, even though he is keen to work. He behaves very well; apparently he concentrates on what he is doing, but has not been able to catch on the reading mechanisms without forgetting. Recently, we succeeded in something, but he still is far behind the rest. I had to change the text he uses. I am now using a different reader with him.

In her relationship with parents, this teacher tried to engage their aid by requesting them to be cautious in placing too many demands on the children. She also asked them to refrain from punishing poor learning so as not to obstruct her work. This often meant placing her in opposition with the parents. One parent told us

> I demand from him that he do his homework, that he study, while the senorita [teacher] tells me I should not demand so much, that I am too demanding. She said that the boy would learn little by little, that he would take some time, but that eventually he would learn. She told me to be patient.

There are no special reasons to believe that this teacher's class had any better intake than the other classes, yet the classroom atmosphere and the student results were different.

Teaching Conditions

On the issue of teacher responsibility for learning, it would be unfair to exclude from these descriptions the working conditions that surround the teaching process. As perceived by the teachers, the factors affecting the quality of their work were the poor material conditions, bureaucratic demands, lack of adequate technical support, curricular deficiencies, extracurricular activities, and, more recently, the consequences of the municipalization of the school system.

The school buildings were not considered satisfactory. The teacher whose lesson on sets we have transcribed worked in a long narrow classroom with small windows. The children were seated in pairs along two rows of chairs separated by a narrow corridor. The surroundings were noisy.

> In this school, another problem is that the premises are not adequate. In winter, the room is very dark. It is too long, the children at the back cannot hear nor see well. And so I have to keep on running backwards and forwards. The children are on top of each other. One cannot teach. You can't hear anything. In itself it's difficult without adding the problem of the band [school band playing in the gym].

The teachers felt they lacked support from other professionals such as the guidance counselor.

> The guidance counselor should be a hundred percent present in the school; working with the children in workshops, in groups, in order to detect, to give them a test, to begin to understand. Or they should test the parents, give them films, talks and all those things. That's something ideal, ideal because when one says that it could be that way, one is told that it is an illusion, that it cannot be so. All that is important now is that there be a lot of children in order to get subsidy. If we find a child with a problem he should be helped. What do we gain by notifying the problem? At the beginning of the year we were asked to fill in a huge form for each child. We did it and what, what has happened? It was supposed to help the children, but nothing has happened.

The curriculum prescriptions were perceived as an imposition and teachers resented their lack of participation in developing the curriculum.

> From what I know, all comes from above and it has always been that way. There never was a syllabus prepared by teachers. I think that if we are talking about a primary curriculum then primary teachers should be called. Now, look at the text issue. To me that was pure business! But we were forced to use such a text.

The teachers we interviewed were also unhappy about the quality of both the programs and the texts used.

> I consider the programs to be unsatisfactory. In the first place, the maths syllabus is too heavy and the textbooks are inadequate. The social sciences syllabus is too short. There are only two or three social sciences items for the year. Natural sciences is good because it has the new method. Special techniques is too long. Thus, one subject does not relate to another.

Extracurricular activities were seen to interrupt the normal course of activities, rather than to have an educational function, especially as they were arranged not by the teacher but by the school head teacher or outside authorities.

> All those activities take up a lot of time. Because, just as we are becoming involved in something we are taken away from it; and then one has to work to set up an exhibition or get the children to recite a poem, or prepare a number. We are interrupted and lose the thread of what we are teaching, the children, especially considering that children are prone to become lost. Too many extracurricular activities! We do not have a right to voice or vote! We are not at all consulted!

As in all other systems, these teachers felt frustrated at the extremely hierarchical and bureaucratic way in which school life was administered.

> Sometimes I have sent in reports (to the diagnostic centres) relating to problems that affect a child . . . and here there is a problem, too much bureaucracy. One cannot decide to do something that might benefit a child because first one has to go through the whole hierarchy, although I was always told: listen colleague, if you think it's convenient, then do it!

The most recent source of difficulties as perceived by the teachers was the municipalization of the school system (see Chapter 1). As the schools passed from centralized to local municipal control, all sorts of unforeseen consequences affecting the teachers had emerged. For example, the new municipalization ruling stipulated that for the schools to receive their State subsidies, they must have an average daily attendance of 45 pupils per classroom. Teachers were urged to see that the number of pupils did not go down, even if they had to fetch their pupils from home. Teachers also perceived this number of children as being excessive given the material conditions under which they had to work.

> I find that it is too much. It's too much work, because there are mothers who want . . . for example, one says to me: "Did he do his homework?" They think that their child is the only one we have to care for, but there are all the rest.
>
> The ideal number would be 15 more or less. But I think one could do a good job with 25. This is all the more necessary given the problems and difficulties of these children; if they were better fed, they did not have the problems they have now.

Not only did teachers have to perform their daily educational activities, but the new municipal system had also added the burden of forms to fill in and of more control on lesson preparation. Faced with these requirements, teachers had to decide either to carry them out during lesson time or after school when they were already tired and had other duties to perform at home.

> It's exhausting! Because one does not finish the work here but has to continue at home. Of course, there are those who say "I don't take anything home." But I can't do office activities here. I can't write, there has to be silence and peace.
>
> This is a recent requirement. I remember that before we only used to have one theme. Now, as colleagues say — we talk among ourselves — we need more time to plan, we waste our time, in this sense, instead of caring for the child who is having problems. Instead of doing that we have to stay to fill in papers and more papers.
>
> Paper filling takes a lot of time from what is one's main task, that is, to teach children, to give them all the time!

Such is the pressure on pupil presence in schools (for subsidy purposes), that the teachers resented what they perceived as a "monetarization" of the schools.

> To me schools have become a business. The people in the technical department [supervisory personnel] are like a foreman who checks whether this or that has been done. Here at school there are problems because of there being other schools around [two other schools are lodged on the same site and function at different times of the day]. We do not know what to do to get more students. We've even been told that we should not make demands to the children and their parents so that we may prevent them from moving to another school. So one has to pretend that the child is progressing even though he may not be, to avoid having the child leave the school.

Job security was also threatened by the municipal system.

> There are schools that have disappeared. They have disappeared. And that brings a lot of problems. Personnel have been changed. In other locations they have lost their jobs. People here have been called to retirement. There are all sorts of fears, and in this way they tie our hands up.
>
> One is not secure nor at rest. I say, if one is not to be secure, if one is not to have security when one is sick or has something, at least one should be secure at work; if not, one cannot work with the nerves at rest. Since our transferral to the Municipality, we have had to sign a new contract every year. That contract may finish and we can be told that the next year we will not have our contract renewed. The situation is not as it was before.

Municipalization had also led to a more complex system of controls and supervision as these functions became shared by Ministry authorities and municipal personnel.

> If one is a professional and responsible, it is awful to be invigilated .... They have come, I don't know how many times to look at our plans, to see that these follow the books. I think it's excessive, they are always supervising and checking us when it would be better if we were left alone.
>
> Those are the details that are demoralizing. They seem to live constantly checking whether the paper or not the paper. Did you turn it in? If it had to be turned in at 4 and you did so at 5 o'clock .... Such is the detail, such is the checking.

In considering the conditions that, to a certain extent, explain the professional frustration of teachers, we wanted to underline some of the mitigating factors for the problems discussed earlier. However, despite the intensity of these conditions, not all that goes on in teaching can be deterministically attributed to factors outside the teachers' sphere of responsibility. Difficulties do not always act as limiting conditions. The ability to overcome them may, in fact, create conditions for more successful results in teaching. Teachers still have to judge what is an unavoidable limitation and what is not. The teacher in our study who had ended the year having no children judged as failures had encountered easy earlier experiences. She had been trained as all other teachers had and she had experienced the same vexing teaching conditions. In her beginning years as a teacher, she had worked in a rural location, traveled long distances every day to get to school, and taught children from very poor and illiterate backgrounds. Her interpretation of this experience, as far as her teaching was concerned, was different, however, from that of other teachers.

> The experience was awful but useful. It's the other face of our profession, different from what is done here . . . . It is the kind of experience that perhaps shows one how to teach.

Interpreting Success and Failure

8

Having experienced the complexity of life in the schools and classrooms of this study, with their sometimes erratic handling of social background, their material limitations, and the contradictory styles of teaching and learning, as well as the meaning structures used to interpret school activities, we understood that it would not be easy to generalize about the production of success or failure in school. We felt, however, that the attempt to reconstruct life as observed should not preclude an effort to highlight events that, in the eyes of the observer, had appeared to be significant. Throughout the analysis of the various country ethnographies, not only did there emerge context-specific pictures of what life in the schools was like, with its routines and predominant operational systems, but it was also possible to discern recurrences from country to country, which suggested the possibility of a more general understanding of the conditions for school failure. Such recurring events have thus been lifted from the mass of available data and placed under broad categories. As defined, these categories may appear to the reader as obvious or simple, but they have been purposefully formulated this way to keep them as close as possible to the facts and to avoid the excesses of abstract conceptualization.

In attempting to look at the four country situations in a general mode and to establish some interpretative categories, we saw the need to give two separate treatments to the data. First, we have what may be called the "observed" processes both within and outside the classroom; from these, we have selected significant events and grouped them under general thematic descriptors. Second, we have noted the meanings that were conveyed to us by the various participants in the educational process, especially the teachers, either directly in interviews or inferred from the observation of events; within these, we have concentrated on what we call their practical educational ideologies. Ideologies are seen as ways of thinking about reality that are superimposed on events and serve to justify actions or to explain situations, at times in distorted or incomplete ways. The consideration of "observed" processes and "inferred" ideologies have, in turn, prepared the way for some suggestions about causes or explanatory factors of failure and suggested what might be done to diminish their effects.

Observed Processes within the Classrooms

Because teachers are the central figures in the classroom and largely determine what takes place within its confines, the focus of this study has been mostly on them and their activities. Thus, a number of situations were seen to be generally associated with conditions that support failure. The fact that they are signaled out as teacher-related behaviours does not mean that they are exclusive to teachers or that they are not acceptable to the entire set of actors that partake in the teaching–learning process, including parents. It is their universality, we believe, that provides them with a particular strength.

Benevolent despotism

Benevolent despotism could be taken as another term for authoritarianism, although it is not precisely or only that. Practically all the teachers in the study had a sense of their responsibility for the course of events within their classes, although not necessarily for its outcomes. The teachers' sense of being conductors and responsible for events seemed to translate itself into viewing themselves in a pupil–teacher relationship in which the pupils confer favours upon the teacher. The teachers' typical call to the children was to request that things be done "for the teacher's sake": *"haganme esto"* (do this for me). The children were regarded as having the duty of rendering services to the teacher, the main service being to learn as indicated. For the most part, with some notable exceptions, children were asked to follow exactly the teacher's instructions, which were delivered in tones of greater or lesser care or respect.

In the Bolivian classrooms, for example, little of the children's own world of experiences was used as a learning input. The concept of pupil participation in the learning process, to which practically all teachers gave lip service, involved merely allowing children to respond to questions or to carry out special tasks allocated to selected pupils. An extreme case of this concept of participation was found in the student's council meetings held in the Chilean schools. Besides being mostly an opportunity for the teacher to obtain help in the enforcement of discipline and order, the pupils were not even given the opportunity to decide for themselves who should take up leadership positions in these councils.

> [In a 4th-year class, the teacher discusses with the pupils the situation of those who have no responsibility on the student council. He explains that they should all be involved either in a committee or in other school activities. He then goes on to tell them that he will be changing some of them from their positions.]
>
> *Teacher:* . . .and maybe also the leaders. I will change them!
>
> *Teacher:* Chairman, open the session!
>
> *Chair student:* In the name of God, the session is open.
>
> [The secretary reads out the minutes.]
>
> *Teacher:* Let's see now. We shall give responsibility to those who do not have it. Also, by the end of the month we will be changing our notebooks. You should not lose your notebooks, because if you do, you must pay for them. You must be responsible! Everybody must have a responsibility. Yes, youngsters, this will help us later when we are grown up and have to work.

Another form of interpreting student participation and of asserting the teacher's right to delegate by grace of his authority was in the selection and conferment of special status to certain pupils. The youngster selected would then be excused from a number of tasks that others had to perform. Such was the case of Patricia in Venezuela (see Chapter 5), whose special treatment included authority to have other children obey her or risk being scolded by the teacher. Similarly, selection could be arbitrarily exercised in the granting of requests from the children, as seen in the following situation.

> *Christian* [to the teacher]: Miss, may I go to the toilet?
> [He walks out of the classroom without waiting for permission to go.]
> *Marcela:* May I go to the toilet?
> [The teacher signals permission.]
> *Gabriel:* May I go to the toilet?
> [Teacher gives a negative signal.]

The sort of messianic aura that appeared to surround the teachers' mode of relationship was illustrated in the teaching monologues reported in the Venezuelan study, where teachers engaged in long series of questions and self-responses, generally intermingling content with disciplinarian elements. Another form of inducing participation and then effectively canceling the contribution that children might make to a learning sequence (see Chapter 5) was when teachers used their own or a book statement to summarize what had been said. An obviously unintended mode of exerting authority in teaching, but one found in many rooms, was to correct statements through means of an incorrect statement.

> [Teacher requests a student to produce his homework.]
> *Pupil:* I sort'a forgot it [*se me le quedo en la casa*]!
> *Teacher:* How, you sorta forgot it? How you gonna learn to speak right [*cuando vai a aprender a hablar bien*]!?

A teacher's position was also asserted when she showed that she considered it a right to decide whether to provide feedback to a pupil's answer or contribution. To ignore pupils' responses, as reported in the Colombian study, was a common practice in all the other classrooms of the study. Pupils' errors were often treated by the teachers as something of a personal insult, to which they reacted by threatening punishment: "Hey, you never do anything well. Next time, I'm going to send you to the office [a punishment]. Now go over to the corner and stand there!"

The frequently observed response of the children to such an authoritarian mode of dealing with them was to accept this as characteristically belonging to the teaching role. A good example of this understanding was the way in which, when asked to take a leadership position during a teaching activity, they imitated their teacher's authoritarian role.

> *Emilia* [acting as coordinator of her group]: Now, let's read!
> [The children read silently, while Emilia does the same aloud.]
> *Emilia:* No! Everyone should look for the subject and predicate!
> [With an authoritarian tone, she reads a sentence and asks each child to indicate which is the subject and which is the predicate.]

These Colombian child coordinators even used the nagging style of the teacher to correct other pupils: "Flor, what do you think we're doing, science or language?" To which Flor responded as she would to the teacher, by saying "I'm sorry!" The informant role enacted sometimes by the pupils was another indication of their support for the teacher's aura.

> *Pupil:* Miss, Agapo didn't bring his book!
> *Teacher* [to Agapo]: Why didn't you bring it?
> [Agapo remains silent.]
> *Pupil who reported him:* He only brought his music book!

Not that there were no pupil rebellions against this teacher role mystique, but they were indirect and mostly took place as discipline violations when they were left alone, presumably as a means of counterbalancing the tension created by the teachers' constant presence in the classroom.

On the whole, children were convinced that teaching is a very important activity, that no matter how the teacher performs, only through her would they learn. "I think that my teacher is more important for my learning"; "I think it is the teachers, they teach and take care for our learning, they serve as our guide to learning."

Failure to learn, however, was perceived by the children as being less attributable to the teacher (see Chapter 7); but even this perception seemed to be an indication of how much esteem they had for the teacher's positive role in promoting learning.

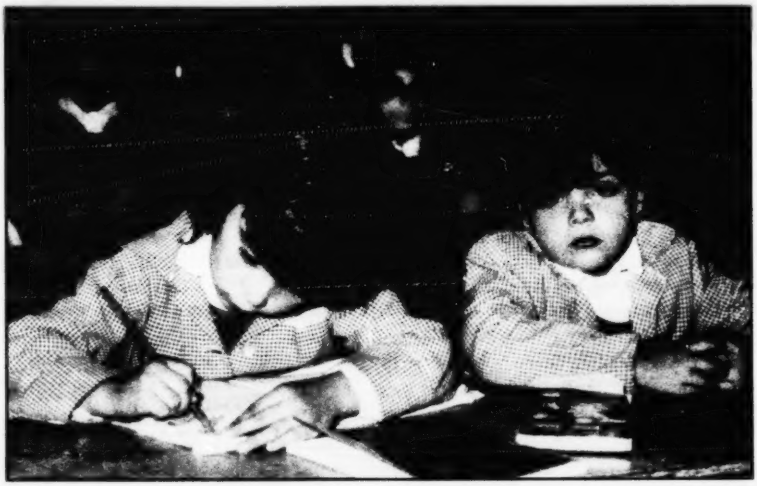
Although parents in some contexts were less willing to endorse a messianic role for the teacher, their criticisms tended not to be directed to the authoritarian mode of teaching, but to various behavioural faults in teachers: "being late, scolding my child, burdening parents with requests for money, too many lessons missed" (because of teachers' absences), etc. In Bolivia, of all the parents interviewed, only one attributed her child's failure to the teacher: "The teacher is bad, she calls my child an ass." In certain respects then, only when benevolent despotism was joined to incompetence were the teachers judged as not fulfilling their role as educators and not stimulating children to learn.

The events observed that led us to conceptualize teachers' behaviour as that of "benevolent despots" did, concurrently with other factors, appear to affect the children's perception about the extent of their ability to work productively. It also affected their response to teaching, rendering it largely automatic and centred on how to guess the adequate response to arbitrary questioning. These effects, however, were softened when teachers manifested care for the children and used nonthreatening language to assert their position.

Learning versus being "good" and "clean"

There is a fine line between the need to teach children to be disciplined, orderly, and clean in their work and the need to ensure that learning takes place. In the first years of primary school, it is especially easy to tip the balance in favour of form rather than content, and this seemed to be the case in many of the classes studied. To write neatly is an important 1st-year teaching objective; however, when quality is judged constantly in terms of how nice something looks, then the real purpose of learning may be defeated.

[In a Colombian 1st-year class, the teacher is conducting a writing-readiness exercise by asking the children to make crosses in a squared notebook. A pupil comes up to the teacher and shows her his notebook.]
Teacher: Yes, it's beautiful! Go back to your place!
Teacher [to another pupil]: Gustavo, good God! Look, you've put a cross in one square and not in the other. Let me see!
Teacher [to the rest of the pupils]: Sit up straight! Put your notebooks in the correct position so that you can do your task correctly!
[She goes on working with Gustavo.]
Teacher: Do you see, Gustavo? You can also do it nicely!



First-grade students, Santiago, Chile.

> [Another pupil brings his work to the teacher.]
> *Teacher:* Beautiful!

La copia (copying into a notebook) was an important part of classroom activities in Chilean schools. Its purpose was defined clearly as one of promoting habits of order and cleanliness. While the teacher was engaged in other activities, the children were asked to copy anodyne sentences such as *Lita toma te* (Lita takes tea), easily susceptible of being read out, incorrectly, as *Lita tomate* because of the emphasis on syllabic reading. However, pupils could also be found copying clearly incorrect sentences such as "*toma la mano*" (take the hand). Most of the time, these children were not asked to read out what they had written and only occasionally did the teacher check their work. For example, a child was seen copying what should have been *la leche es rica* (milk is nice) as *la le es rica.* Whenever tasks were corrected, the emphasis was always on order and cleanliness.

> *Teacher* [to a pupil]: Why that red line? You must put your letters close together so that they all fit in the notebook!
> *Teacher* [to another pupil]: You must copy downwards. I don't want those little ears on the books [referring to the way the paper lifts at the edges due to use]. If they have little ears it's because you are careless; I always put clips on them. Tell your mother to buy a plastic cover to put over the paper cover, so that it looks nice!
> *Pupils* [repeat in chorus]: Nice.

The observation of norms was also included in the concept of being a good student. Thus, teachers took quite a lot of time to teach these norms and to make sure that they were observed. Such norms, however, especially those that were school rules, were not always explained; therefore, not only did they appear to be arbitrary, but they were also exercised arbitrarily. Examples of such norms were the rules about lining up before entering a classroom, about dressing, the procedures for greeting someone entering a classroom, or the demand that children go to the toilet only during break time. Teachers, however, also had their own norms, which they explained somewhat more frequently. The teaching of rules in the 1st year tended to overshadow other teaching, both in time and attention, as was evident from the constant interruptions used to remind pupils that they should observe the established norms.

> *Teacher:* What are the norms for silent reading?
> *Pupils:* Not to talk!
> *Teacher:* Montoya, why are you away from your place, you have work to do and it must be finished by ten past ten.
> *Teacher* [to a pupil who is sitting with his back against the wall]: Hey, don't throw yourself around, sit straight!
> *Teacher* [to another pupil]: Charlie, this is lesson time. Let's get that clear!
> *Teacher:* Everyone pay attention!
> *Teacher* [to a pupil]: Eric Correa, we are looking at the board: I haven't told you to get your books out!
> *Teacher:* We are having a lesson. We must keep our mouths shut!

A routine partly connected with learning and partly connected with self-discipline was the assignment and correction of homework. In almost all the classes observed, this represented a major component of everyday activities, taking up a fair amount of the time at the beginning of the day. Correction, however, did not always involve what the word suggested. While keeping an eye on the rest of the class, teachers' attention was mostly concentrated on seeing whether homework had actually been done and how nicely it was presented.

> *Teacher* [to the pupils]: Take out your notebooks. I am going to look at your calligraphy work!
> [The children obey and the teacher walks through the rows of desks, looking and commenting on the work of the children.]
> *Teacher:* Homework is to be done at home! The lazy ones must come with their mother. . . .Your mother is good at complaining, but you don't do your homework! . . .You must do them! These exercises must be done at home. It only takes a little time!. . .Those children who didn't bring their homework will be left without a break tomorrow. . . .Ernesto, who did the work for you? You didn't do the big numbers!
> *Boy* [sitting next to Ernesto]: It was his brother who did it!
> *Teacher:* So you were absent and didn't do your homework! You must do it again tomorrow!

The amount of time taken up with procedural and discipline-related activities (30 to 40 minutes before a lesson would get going) suggests that, in practice, teachers were ready to lessen learning time, if required, to keep the pupils firmly under control. The "good" pupil, for these teachers, was a well-behaved child who empathized with and accepted their authority, defending it before the other pupils ("don't bother Miss!").

In examining the reasons for all these instances of concentrated attention on posture, silence, and so on, a plausible explanation is that the homes from where most of the children came were judged by the teachers as being "unsatisfactory." In other words, the operational conviction of the teachers was that poor children by nature are dirty and undisciplined. Thus, teachers seemed to think that before any learning could take place, these faults would have to be corrected. In creating appropriate conditions for such corrections to occur, teachers seemed to engage most of their energy, thereby displacing what should have been their main concern: helping pupils with their learning difficulties.

Labeling, downgrading

The Promethean mystique that sometimes is conferred on the teachers' role reaches its most negative expression when it includes the right to select "chosen" or "favourites" from among the group. The observation of Chilean classrooms (Chapter 7) highlighted the way in which teachers, by the end of a school year, carried out such forms of selection. Certain children became targets for teacher behaviours that ranged from pejorative nicknaming to downright accusations of laziness, dishonesty, and irresponsibility. As was found in the cases narrated in the Chilean ethnography, most of the children affected by such a teacher attitude lost confidence in themselves and their ability to be successful at work. Most of these pupils became the school failures of that year of observation.

The consequences of a labeling process that involves erroneous or misguided perceptions about what a child is able to do were not so clearly evident in the other country ethnographies; this was mainly because none of the other countries pursued the range of developments in a school year as did Chile. From their observations of school and classroom life, however, all study groups did report the persistence of attitudes we have represented as "denigratory" or "downgrading." One of the most common was the attitude described in the Colombian study as teacher's "irony" or "intermittent deafness," involving sarcastic comments or responses to pupil interventions, or the attitude of ignoring a pupil's contribution to the lesson.

Colombia

Teacher [with irony in her voice]: Good! Let me congratulate you on not bringing your homework!

Venezuela

Teacher: As Luis likes to look like a monkey, I'm going to bring him a disguise so that he can monkey about with everybody! I'm going to bring a puppet one day and ask him to dance and move around, and as you like to imitate everything, you will have to do what he does.

Bolivia

Teacher: Shut up! Edwin, shut up! Now, let's write in the number four. . . .

Denigratory attitudes were also represented as straightforward downgrading of a pupil's self-respect.

Chile

Teacher [walking around the class and looking at the children trying to make words with letter shapes. She goes past Alberto]: Alberto Pereira never does anything, he loses his books, his pencils, his erasers. . . !

In some classes, as, for example, in 2nd year in Bolivia, the climate was one of constant nagging. Although 1st-year children generally experienced kind teachers who were tolerant of their difficulties and misbehaviour, once they moved to 2nd year, the situation changed considerably. The atmosphere then became one of shouts, threats, and punishments, which led pupils to retreat more and more into passivity and silence.

> *Pupil:* Me, Miss?
> *Teacher:* You, shut up. . .silence. I will speak. Eliodoro, you haven't washed your ears!
> *Teacher* [referring over and over to the meaning of a plane]: What is a plane?
> [Pupils remain silent.]
> *Teacher:* Let's see Rina, what is a plane?
> [Rina does not answer.]
> *Teacher:* Let's see Humberto, you always have so much to say!
> [Humberto remains silent.]
> *Teacher:* There's time for everything except learning; here it looks as if I am talking to the walls, to the chalkboard!
> [As the class continues to be silent, the teacher repeats the concept, after which the children repeat in chorus what she has just said.]

In many of these classes, children could be singled out as either "useless" or "favourites." Patricia was one of the favourites in Venezuela who was always being called upon to perform a special service for the teacher: to provide her with a book or to wipe the board. Patricia responded to this attention by flattering the teacher whenever there was a chance to do so, thus reinforcing her position as a "favourite."

> [The teacher is drawing a butterfly on the board. Two pupils suggest it is ugly.]
> *Camilo:* Ooh, the butterfly!
> *Enrique:* Miss, can I do it for you?
> *Camilo:* I thought the butterfly was a grasshopper!
> *Patricia:* Miss, it's very nice!
> *Teacher:* Thank you, Patricia!

In Patricia's class, Victoria received a very different treatment. A quiet girl who hardly interacted with anybody, Victoria was always held responsible for any noise there might be in the room or was nagged at if, by any chance, she failed to live up to the teacher's reasonable or unreasonable expectations.

> *Teacher:* Whose is this book? I'm asking because it doesn't have a name!
> *Victoria:* Mine, mine!
> *Teacher* [with sarcastic tone]: So you didn't put your name on it; you want us to guess. . . .
> *Teacher:* And this one, to whom does it belong?
> *Another pupil:* Mine, mine!
> [The teacher gives him the book without saying anything.]

Arbitrariness, nagging, and consistent ignoring of the contributions of some children, while accepting those of others in the context of teaching–learning activities seemed to set the stage for failure. This obviously does not explain all of the process, but depending on how supportive the home environment or how consistently negative the atmosphere at school might be, the early development of an incapacity to cope could doom a child to failure. "I think that my son suffers at school," said the mother about Boris, a Bolivian child, who felt he was no good because his teacher had told him so, because the other kids had said so, and because he really perceived himself as being stupid (*"Soy un burro"*).

Teaching as a "guessing game"

Teaching is, of course, the main concern of the school and the central activity of every classroom. It is assumed that through teaching, a content will be conveyed and children will learn. Few teachers view themselves as mere caretakers of young people; on the contrary, they are conscious of their responsibility to provide the stimulation for children to learn. Beyond acknowledging this initial responsibility, however, there is wide divergence regarding how much further it extends. That is, in their teaching activities, how responsible are teachers for the extent of their pupils' learning (see Chapter 7)? In this sense, the way in which teaching–learning actually takes place is of importance if the role of the teacher is to be examined.

In considering the country ethnographies, it was possible to see forms of structuring the teaching situation that responded more or less to the norms set forth in curricular reforms. Some teachers were careful to observe the format provided by their Ministry of Education syllabuses, i.e., behavioural objectives, teaching stages involving motivation activities, development, conclusion, and, in every case, the setting of and correction of homework.

Teachers in Venezuela used this structure, as did one of the teachers in Colombia who was involved in the Escuela Nueva experiment (see Chapter 3). Chilean teachers also used this structure; teachers in Bolivia, less so. Thus, the predominant structure observed was what might be called the "modern" form of organizing teaching, in contrast to the traditional lecture–recitation mode found elsewhere. However, the flesh and blood of the observed teaching structure was quite different in consistency.

Teachers could thus be placed along a continuum ranging from those who were convinced that the life of a teacher consisted of awakening and developing a child's potential to think and to act autonomously and creatively, to those, unfortunately the majority, who felt most satisfied when the class had expressed what was in that teacher's mind, no matter how ill suited the means. Observation of the teaching in many of the classes allowed us to detect as a predominant style what we might call a mechanistic form of recitation (question–answer sequences). This seemed to exact as a concomitant learning activity what we have called "guessing."[1] Teaching was understood by pupils and teachers alike as a game where guessing held the central position; or, one might say, it appeared as a distorted application of the principles of "discovery learning."

> *Teacher:* Put your books away! Now, what is a sound?
> [The teacher begins to talk about what she was dictating earlier.]
> *Teacher:* Now silence, what is a sound?
> [Pupils remain silent.]
> *Teacher:* What is a sound?
> [Pupils talk among themselves, but do not answer.]
> *Teacher:* Shh! I'm asking you!
> *Juan:* The vibration of one body against another.

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[1] The phrase "teaching as a guessing game" was coined by the Colombian and Chilean researchers as they observed the children engaged in a constant effort to guess what the teacher was aiming at.

Teacher: Let's see. Who can tell me what is a sound?
[Pupils remain silent.]
Teacher: Let me see, who can tell me what is a *sound?*
[Pupils still silent.]
Pedro: The vibration. . .
Teacher [interrupting]: Of what?
[Pedro does not respond.]
Raul: The vibration of two bodies!

[Another occasion]
Teacher: Well, now look at this little picture, let's see!
Boy: A girl!
Teacher: So, what does it seem to you?
Pupils [together]: A girl!
Teacher: A girl, a doll, what else?
Pupils: An element!
Teacher: What meaning does this girl, this doll have for us in maths?
Pupils [together]: An element!
Teacher: What?
Pupils [together]: An element!
Teacher: An element, a what?
Pupils [together]: A unit.

[Another occasion]
Teacher: Yesterday, we began to talk about something very nice which I drew in this [she begins to draw a circle]. What is it called?
Pupils [together]: A set!
Teacher [repeats without correcting]: How did I call it?
Some pupils: A closed curve!
[The teacher has finished the drawing and now there is a circle with teacups in it.]
Teacher: So what is this?
One pupil: Teacups.
[The teacher notices that the children have not understood and so she retraces her steps.]
Pupil: Teacups.
Teacher: Which I closed in with a?
Pupils: Curve!
Teacher: What kind of curve?
Pupil: Closed!
Teacher: This is a set of?
Pupils: Teacups!

The purposes of teaching, acknowledged as such for the 1st year of the primary school, are that children should learn to read, to write, and to perform basic mathematical operations. When talking about themselves and their classes, the teachers in this study, in fact, measured their effectiveness in these terms: "By the end of the year I hope that all my children will have learned how to read." Those who considered that they would have failure cases suggested that this would occur in spite of their efforts and that it would be due to causes for which they were not responsible.

The development of language, which is an important element in a child's understanding of the world and in his or her relations to others, was an almost entirely ritualistic activity in the schools studied. Reading was taught by means of the syllabic method and took the same form in practically every 1st-year class observed.

Bolivia

Teacher [writing on the board]: MA - MA: ma-me-mi-mo-mu, PA - PA: pa-pu-pi-po-pe, DE - DO: di-do-da-du-de.
Teacher [to the children as she points to the words]: Now, all of you, repeat!
[Pupils repeat loudly.]

Venezuela

Teacher: ma-me-mi-mo.
Joselo: ma-me-mi-mo.
Teacher: ma-ma.
Joselo: ma-ma.
Teacher: a-m-a.
Joselo: ama.
Teacher: No, that is not "a", as is this one [she points to a letter in the book].
Teacher: What letter is this one?
Joselo: O.
Teacher: Mi mama me ama [my mother loves me]. You must revise, go and sit down!

Reading comprehension was rarely achieved because of an excessive emphasis on form, punctuation, and intonation as the children read; not even through guessing were the pupils able to deliver answers about the texts they read that conveyed any impression they understood their meaning.

Teaching the older classes involved the attainment of objectives that are not as tangible as those of the 1st year. For the most part, teachers in this study tended to perceive their goal as getting through the syllabus, regardless of how much the pupils might be understanding or learning. The syllabus contents were straightforward: language, science, maths, and some historical facts, besides crafts, physical education, and musical activities. The principal teaching strategies used were *la copia* and *el cuestionario.* These exercises consisted of copying from a text or from the board (often out of the teacher's guide or the children's textbook); sometimes these copies took the form of questions for the children to answer and memorize at home. The teaching of maths followed the usual technique of explanations followed by individual and group practice. On the whole, then, teaching methods tended to be fairly stereotyped in their use of the recitation methods and of routinely performed practical exercises. Occasionally, such as in the Bolivian case (Chapter 6) and in the creative community school in Venezuela (Chapter 5), it was possible to detect the use of more active and imaginative methods such as group discussions, dramatizations, puppet playing, and so on. However, these were rare exceptions from the generally grim atmosphere in which most lessons took place.

There is not much point in dwelling further on the ritualistic character of teaching as found in many of these classrooms; it is a commonplace cliché to characterize teaching in low socioeconomic contexts of poor countries in this way. However, by grouping all these teaching forms under the heading of the "guessing game," we have sought to highlight the extent to which teaching of this type is removed from the development of meaning structures and intelligent practical activity. By the end of their primary schooling, the children in these classes will have developed a limited vocabulary, minimal reading and writing skills, and, therefore, will hardly be capable of creative writing and will not have incorporated basic science concepts and facts into their everyday knowledge of the world that surrounds them. The fortunate ones will be helped at home and may improve; the resistant ones will use their wits to learn on their own (as seen in the example of children looking for meanings in a dictionary (Chapter 3)). However, for most of those faced with such styles of teaching in authoritarian contexts and subjected to denigratory attitudes, the benefits of schooling will hardly be discernible.

There are few anthropological studies about schooling in Latin America[2]; however, among the few that have included the observation of life in classrooms and schools, there has been a noticeable consensus in detecting the kinds of teaching characteristics that we also found in our study. The work of Reichel-Dolmatoff and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1973) on the Colombian community of Aritama carried out 25 years ago found that teaching in the local schools was beset by repetitive methods of instruction (knowledge expressed as series of questions and answers), including the frequency of erroneous contents. The authors detected attitudes among the teachers of favouritism, prejudice, social and cultural downgrading of the Indian people who lived in the community, and manifest preference for the well-dressed, well-behaved children.

> For the children who go to school, the teaching methods to which they are subjected, have a long-range influence. In the first place, children are taught systematically about the value that being well-dressed and well-behaved confers in terms of prestige, and they are taught to abhor and to ridicule any form of manual labour or cooperative effort. In the second place, "knowledge" is reduced to a set of questions and answers which are already determined, and beyond which, if anything, there is very little to add or to learn. This same behavioural model is retained during adult life, the individual responding in a routine and stereotyped way to much repeated questions but refusing to answer the unusual ones because that could diminish his prestige.
>
> (Reichel-Dolmatoff and Reichel-Dolmatoff 1973)

Teachers and their Practical Ideologies

As we reflected upon our experience of work in the various country contexts and read and sought to make sense of the many notes about classrooms and school events, we discovered the almost startling fact that the teacher's interpretations were extremely important. Even though the study did not focus on these interpretations or intend to examine them in any depth, it was almost impossible to ignore their presence and possible contribution to the experiences of success and failure undergone by the school children.

The teachers' thinking, interpretative framework, or ideologies, as one may chose to call them, are widely studied in the current literature on teaching.

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[2] Carlos Calvo (1979), for the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), reviewed the available anthropological literature on education in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. He concluded that, although wide use was made of anthropological methods for studying educational problems, few studies were truly anthropological in nature; even fewer were studies that examined the effects of teaching and schooling from an anthropological perspective. More recently, the work of Elsie Rockwell and associates in Mexico has concentrated on studies of the Mexican primary school (e.g., Rockwell 1982; Rockwell and Galvez 1982).

What is examined in these studies are the working definitions that teachers construct for the situations they face: their often unexamined frameworks for interpreting what is going on and for taking the long-range and the more immediate decisions required for their practice as educators.[3] From a theoretical point of view, the rationale for some of these studies is drawn from phenomenological sociology, especially the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), Schutz (1967), and Schutz and Luckmann (1974), with their stress on the structure of the "lived-world" experiences, which are normally taken for granted but, in fact, act as perspectives for decision-making.

In seeking to comprehend these interpretative schemes, it has seemed to us that the use Sharp (1981) makes of Althusser's (1977) concept of "practical ideologies" is particularly relevant. Althusser defines "practical ideologies" in opposition to "theoretical ideologies" as the "complex formation of montages [sets] of notions–representations–images, on the one hand, and of montages [sets] of behaviour–conduct–attitudes and gestures on the other" (Sharp 1981). The totality of these notions and behaviours become practical norms for taking up positions with respect to real things and to real individual and social problems. These real things and situations are, in classic Marxist theory, the structure of social relations and productive forces that correspond to a mode of production (such as in capitalism) where ideology[4] is simply the form by which, at the level of concepts, ideas, values, and norms, the contradictions in the real situation are veiled.

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[3] These studies have been carried out from different theoretical perspectives. For a review on work within the cognitive psychology framework, see Clark and Yinger (1981). Focusing on the teacher's viewpoint in the definition of classroom situations, Stebbins (1975) endeavoured to show, in a study of Jamaican and Canadian teachers, the thoughts and behaviour with which teachers operate on the job and of which they barely are conscious. Woods (1983) reviewed studies on "teacher perspectives" carried out in Britain within the symbolic interactionist framework. Elbaz (1983) has studied what she calls the teacher's practical knowledge; by this, she means "knowledge of self, of the milieu of teaching, of subject matter, curriculum development and instruction" (p. 14). This includes not only intellectual beliefs, but also perceptions, feeling, values, purpose, and commitment (p. 117).

[4] Ideology is one of the most debated concepts within theories inspired by Marxism. The interpretations range from those that subscribe to a very crude form of determinism, implying that the subject has very little or no participation in his or her ideologization process. In its more lucid form, the determinist position is expounded by Louis Althusser (1977), who denies the notion of ideology as a false representation of reality because its origins lie precisely in a reality beset with contradictions that must be overcome in practice before the distortions present in ideology are removed. He does not believe, however, that ideology will ever disappear because it also includes the way in which humans "live the relation between them and their conditions of existence." This presupposes both a real relation and an imaginary, "lived" relation. People, however, do not contribute to the building of their ideology; they find it already there. It functions like "cement" to bind people together and secure social cohesion. Jurgen Habermas (1971), representing what might be called neocritical Marxism, contends that contemporary western capitalism presents a situation that cannot be analysed in exactly the same terms that Marx did in the 19th century. He feels that simple class interests are no longer what maintain the capitalist mode of production. Class antagonisms have not been abolished but have become latent; the conflict zone, he feels, is displaced to subcultural groups (racial and ethnic). Likewise, Habermas contends that the degree of involvement of the subject (better understood as a collective subject) in the maintenance of ideology is an important one. Inasmuch as this subject is able to understand what the sources of his behaviour are and how it relates to conditions in society, there exists ground for the overcoming of such conditions. In other words, as Thompson (1983:95) asserts, "The societal subjects may attempt to dispel the illusions of ideology through a collective interpretation of needs under the counterfactual conditions of rational discourse." Likewise, Gramsci's historical conception of ideology underlines the role of mass consciousness as a progressive and necessary condition for revolutionary change (this represented as the struggle for ideological hegemony): "a 'dialectics of consciousness' that is rooted in the phenomenology of everyday life" (cf. Bogg 1976:123), but that is not independent from structural transformations.

Our use here of the concept of "practical ideology" is more pragmatic than its Marxist origins might allow. It seems to be a useful category, however, to designate the notion of a representation of reality that obscures the nature of its problems. In using it, we are mostly concerned about the specific way in which this representation is both received and constructed by the subject and its often less than conscious nature (Habermas 1971; Lacan 1970), and about the fact that it veils the responsibility or participation of the subject (i.e., the teacher) in the reinforcement of conditions that sustain the problems in reality. In other words, to us, it seemed that when faced with the difficulties that the condition of being poor brings to young children, teachers, whether consciously or not, come to accept, somewhat uncritically, permissible available explanations to interpret these problems and to determine their course of action.

The use of these explanations is further justified by the structural pressures from the politicoeducational systems of education concerned (low salary level, poor working conditions, irritating rules, and regulations affecting their work, some of which were referred to in Chapter 1). These pressures, in different ways, have the effect of restricting the teachers' possibility of fulfilling publicly articulated educational aims and policies. The same effect results from the teachers' awareness of the limited pedagogical equipment received through training or from their more experienced colleagues. Thus, so it seemed to us, it becomes plausible for teachers to accept the available explanations of pupil failure and to feel justified in shifting their responsibility in this respect to outside factors (situations and people).

From the analysis of the country ethnographies, what seemed to emerge in practically all cases was that teachers encountered their everyday teaching demands and problems by superimposing interpretation on the events as lived; interpretations that, taken in isolation, seemed plausible and certainly related to real things, but that in the context of the educational process in which these teachers were involved, were incomplete and often distorted. In this way, the effect of these interpretations was to stop the search for more accurate explanations of the difficulties encountered.

Popkewitz et al. (1982), in their study on educational reforms in three different types of schools in the United States, make use of a distinction that helps to understand the significance of the success or failure of a program. They talk about a "surface" layer of meaning that provides criteria or standards for people to judge the outcomes of a program; e.g., passing an exam or fulfilling specified objectives. However, the "underlying" layer of meaning includes those assumptions and guidelines for actions that provide people in an institution with a feeling of security. The way we see what we have called "practical ideologies" is as a set of beliefs about what causes success or failure that are partially rooted in the teachers' interpretation of social or other pedagogical theories and partially rooted in the need for teachers to assert their personal and professional status within a context that is not particularly supportive of this. The function of these "practical ideologies" is to make, as Popkewitz et al. (1982) suggest, "the activities, interactions and teaching/learning experiences" in which they are involved seem "plausible and legitimate." Although the implications of the theories that sustain such practical ideologies are not always clear to the teacher, the wording conforms in a more or less polished way to the concepts embedded in the theories of origin; it is in that way we find similar expressions being conveyed by teachers throughout the four countries in our study. Using the concept of "hegemony" in its Gramscian connotations (Gramsci 1971; see Boggs 1976), it might be possible to say that these conceptualizations of the reasons for failure are part of the dominant ideologies to which the teachers are subjected, both at the time of their training as well as through their unions and the inherited interpretative frames teachers receive from their equals or older peers.

In seeking to present the sources for these practical ideologies as we found them expounded by the teachers in this study, it seemed to us that they could be grouped into two perspectives: those involving some form of determinism and those resting on what we might call the traditional views of pedagogy.

Determinist ideologies

Underlying many of the explanations of failure were views about the effects of socioeconomic background, about cultural and linguistic conditions, and about various types of pathologies affecting the children as individuals.

The schools included in this study were attended by the poorest children in their cities or regions. The teachers, although often not very removed in social origin from those whom they taught, conveyed a concept of themselves as being of higher status in view of their education and position. Perhaps, because of this concept, they behaved in a patronizing manner or were uninterested in the "socially inferior" children; some teachers were even hostile. With varying degrees of concern, most teachers interpreted the causes of poor learning or poor behaviour as being due fatalistically to background. Home background received several meanings. It could be the sheer poverty in which many families lived coupled with cultural and linguistic deficiences as teachers assessed these. It could also refer to family relationships (e.g., absent father, alcoholism, children brought up by grandparents or relatives). In practically every explanation of why a child failed to learn, we heard expressions such as the following.

Bolivia

Teacher: What I understand by school failure, the main of what I understand is children malnutrition, because as soon as we dictate something. . .there are some who understand immediately. . .those who have been well fed; but the undernourished, the raquitic, will not have understood no matter if we explain two, three, or five times. There are children who come to school. . .we see them, they never have a penny to buy something to eat at break time. We know who they are. . . .

Chile

Teacher [referring to a girl who is a poor learner]: Because at home there sometimes is lack of detergent to wash the clothes. . . . Then there are food problems which if they happen to children are irreversible. Because I once spoke to a doctor and he told me they are irreversible. "In this sense," he said, "at this early age it is very important." He told me "it's

> irreversible." Because as he told me, "the child who did not have this or that, just did not have it. There is nothing we can do for him when he is grown up. For example, I can't give him something for his bones if his bone structure is already formed." So, it's just like building a house with a bad foundation.

The cultural background of parents was also judged to be determinant in what a child could or could not do. For the Bolivian teachers, for example, the situation they called "bilingualism" was all important. If parents could not speak Spanish, then they could not provide support for what their children learned at school.

> *Teacher:* Of course there is a big problem, because no matter how much we explain they do not understand us. Why? Because they do not know enough Spanish; they speak what they can when they are at school but as soon as they get home and find their parents speaking only Aymara, there it goes!

If parents had little or no education, it could be assumed that their children would be amost totally handicapped in their chances of success. We asked a teacher why she thinks that there are children who are beginning to fail at school.

> When I look at the pedagogical panorama of parents, what I see is that those who have the highest level [of education]rarely have moved beyond the 2nd or 3rd year of the primary school; they are potential illiterates. Because at some point they learned to read, but by now they have forgotten what they learned for lack of practice. I notice that in one case, somebody could not sign the registration book. People tend to lie about their years of schooling; they say they have more than what they really have. There are few who acknowledge: "In truth, madam, I never went to school."

The racial origin, not just the linguistic background, was also seen as a potential determinant of failure; all sorts of social evils appeared to be associated with being, for example, of Indian descent.

> In the case of Patricia Sanchez. . .how terrible! They are of Mapuche [Indian] descent; the husband beats his wife in front of the children; they all sleep in the same bed. What a mess! I don't know how they manage!

Besides the shortcomings of social origin, poverty, and other cultural limitations, the chances of children who were deemed as unintelligent were even further lessened. In many classrooms, as soon as a child showed some evidence of slow learning, he or she was considered "pathological," requiring specialist attention and, therefore, was not treatable at school. Some teachers, as in the following case, conceptualized it as a "central deficiency."

> *Teacher:* Then, as far as the deficiencies we have found children to have, for example, central deficiencies; they cannot respond to the system.
> *Interviewer:* What is a central deficiency?
> *Teacher:* Problems of the brain, of mental health. We are teachers of normal children and we are not trained to be special education teachers. That could also be one of the problems.

In Chile, the practice was for teachers to send their problem children to diagnostic centres in the hope that the children might be recognized as mentally deficient or suffering from malfunctions such as dyslexia; thereby, the teachers might be excused from the responsibility of dealing with such cases.

Pedagogical traditionalism

Many of the teachers not only seemed to attribute their pupils' learning difficulties to home background or "mental deficiencies" as they called them, but also believed that there was nothing they could do about these difficulties; they felt this belief to be justified because of their adherence to what might be called exhortative views about education passed on in the tradition of their training schools and, sometimes, in the declarations of educational politicians. These views included statements about education aimed at the "integral development of the human person" and embodied in the various social institutions, of which the school was only one. In the practical interpretation of some of the educators we encountered, these declarations could be taken to mean that if one of the educational agencies failed, the others could do very little more; or, as a Colombian supervisor put it to a group of teachers, "education is tripod, if one of the legs collapses, the whole stool does also." Thus, all teachers appeared convinced that the family's contribution is central to any possibility of success in schooling and that this not only means consideration of its sociocultural level but also the willingness of parents to cooperate with teachers and the school. In practice, this notion of cooperation was interpreted, so it seemed to us, in ways that often had nothing to do with what might properly be considered the meaning of family cooperation. As seen in Chapter 7, good parents were judged to be those who visited the school, talked to the teacher, and, above all, provided various material contributions to the school. Parental contribution was also interpreted as uncritical acceptance of what the teachers had to say about an issue. There seemed to be a constant cry against what was interpreted as a lack of collaboration and complaints were voiced in the following manner: "children are sent to school only to avoid them bothering parents at home"; "parents are indifferent in general," they just order the teacher "to correct him"; "parents never come to meetings"; "if the family is disorganized, so also are the children."

In assessing the reasons for poor learning or outright failure of their pupils, there were statements such as the following:

> I think Thomas could have matured and moved ahead if he had been helped at home. His mother never helped him.
>
> [Ximena] Her problem was her home. Her mother was a nurse and could not care for the girls. She was left in the hands of a half-crazy helper, it seems.
>
> [Mario] His parents are illiterate and cannot help him; but I have spoken to the eldest sister and asked her to help. . . . The mother and father are very stubborn. They did not send him to kindergarten.

Similar examples were obtained in the Venezuelan schools, although they were more tempered with an acceptance of responsibility on the part of the teachers.

> I believe that education starts in the home; if the child comes with habits already developed, he will adapt better to school.

> I would place in a hierarchy [of responsibility] not only the teachers but also the parents, because they are responsible for what a child achieves, because a child will be successful in the measure of the help his teacher and parents give him.

A Colombian teacher was heard addressing parents at a meeting with what one might easily characterize as a patronizing tone.

> There are children who behave badly every day, and I am alone. You allow me to suffer. Some are very stupid. Education is not provided at school, it comes from the home. We do not want to have them like statues, they should talk, participate, dialogue. . . . Not all children come clean, though not all come dirty either. You should check them to see if they have lice. You, their *mamitas* [mothers], should bathe the 1st-year ones at least once a week, wash behind their ears. . .underwear, socks. . .smells prevent us from working.

Another pedagogical factor that seemed to affect the teachers' interpretations of what were the limits of their power and responsibility toward pupils' learning was their concept of "motivation." This was seen partly as something having the magic effect of leading to learning and partly as something that children could more or less voluntarily cultivate, unless, as they seemed to think, their deprived background stultified this capacity. Teachers generally did not seem to see the relationship between the children's motivation and the provision of objective conditions for them to make sense of what they were being taught. They appeared to consider themselves as successful in their endeavours as long as a pupil sat attentively during the lesson and participated in the long sessions of recitation giving precise answers to what was asked. If that was not the case, the deviation would be explained as pupil distraction or lack of the will to learn; this absence of "inner stimulation" would then be attributed to low intelligence or lack of family cooperation.

> *Teacher* [talking about Pedro]: I think he is all right. Because children who are not able to understand are those who recognizedly have other problems.

In the acceptance of explanations for pupil failure coming from social determinist theories or traditional pedagogic exhortation, teachers seemed to allay the genuine discomfort produced by constraints from the system and from their professional and working conditions. In almost all the situations observed, teachers complained about these things (see Chapter 7). For example, the filling in of endless forms required by the local authorities or by the Ministry of Education was a source of anger for many teachers.

> We seem to be constantly supervised; we were told off because we did not fill in some information about our pupils' bone structure; we don't know about this! The most we can do about it is to correct the position in which children sit. . .and so we get complaints because we haven't provided the information about bone structure: "that so and so doesn't have it". . . . Or a parent did not tell us how much he earns. I received a complaint about this.

Crowded classrooms also concerned some teachers, who viewed this as one of the main causes of their teaching difficulties. Bureaucratic arrangements were criticized on the grounds that they violated ingrained beliefs about what constituted ideal conditions for learning; e.g., having 30 or 40 children instead of 15 in a class or having an imbalance in the distribution of sexes favouring what they considered to be the more difficult sex to teach.

> *Teacher:* I also have a discipline problem in my class. Because there are more boys; there are 27 boys and 11 girls. That causes a problem. I was given more boys. I said we could make an adjustment, we could have an equitable distribution in each class. Because in classes where there are more boys they play different things, they are rougher, they are more bothersome, they have less concept of responsibility and discipline. Girls are more mature. Boys are more babyish; they are endlessly playing about, bothering. . . .
>
> *Interviewer:* How did this situation come about? Was there no way that you could have been left without so many boys?
>
> *Teacher:* No, they were already placed in classes. There was no possibility. It was a system, the papers were already filled. It was mostly a problem of papers. But in other schools, they were distributed proportionately. There was only one list. The head teacher would then place a girl and a boy in each class, and without having yet had a diagnostic test so as to avoid one class having all the bad pupils.

How did the teachers in our study come to conceptualize their interpretation of pupil failure as due largely to background limitations and to lack of fulfillment of traditionally accepted educational norms? In the 1960s and 1970s, teachers in Latin America encountered through training and in-service courses, as well as through other mechanisms, social theories that accentuated the limitations placed upon individual development by socioeconomic and cultural background. That was partly the function performed by studies of the determinants of school achievement, which considered the relationship between background factors, school resources, and learning, but which failed to look at what happens inside the schools that could be affecting pupil outcomes. Also, through many of the dominant pyschological theories, teachers were introduced to the world of IQ testing and learning disorders (including the all-embracing dyslexia) and were informed that other factors, pathological in origin, could affect learning; this led teachers all too frequently to believe that "problem" children were instances of "mental disorder" and, thus, noneducable.

From another point of view, teachers were presented with traditional philosophies of education that conceptualized education as an integrated process to which teachers and parents contribute equally: if one part of the team fails, then the whole educational process collapses (see statement by Colombian supervisor cited earlier). In the teachers' view, however, among children of poor background, it is the family side of the team that is more often the failing partner. So what could the teachers in our study be left with if all these understandings of current theories had been explicitly or implicitly adopted as interpretative frameworks for their practice? They would only have a few pedagogical tools, and these in mostly uncomfortable conditions, to put to work more or less mechanically. If their educational system had adopted behavioural objectives, they would function with teacher guides that told them exactly what to do every minute of a lesson and what exactly to measure as a learning outcome. Such activities might or might not relate to the world lived in by the children, as is evident from the question asked by a boy being taught in one of the experimental classrooms of the Escuela Nueva in Colombia, who was working with the programed guide made available for his class. "Why" asked the boy (who lived in an area of rural Colombia that was suffering its 3rd year of drought) "does this book say that three-quarters of the world is water? There is very little water around here."

These teachers might remember that lessons have initial motivation, development, and practice activities and stick to this format regardless of the content of such segments or whether they were to be more than instances for correcting form and presentation, for advancing one or two pages in a book, or for reminding children that they should do a piece of homework that is no more than a copying exercise. If following the established structure did not prove as conducive to learning as expected, teachers would not have to feel uncomfortable or question their own practice because the received theories, made part of their interpretative perspective, would be there to support them and to diminish the perception of their contribution to the educational process.

In synthesis, it seemed to us that through the material of our observations and interviews with teachers and pupils as well as through our knowledge of the social context of the countries involved, we were able to advance an explanation about the way in which teachers contribute to the high degree of failure among poor children in Latin American schools. This explanation, it seemed to us, had to focus not only on the quality of teaching (classroom practices), but also on the interpretative framework (practical ideologies) used by teachers to deal with pupils considered to be at risk (behaviour and learning difficulties). We reached this conclusion after having reflected on what teachers told us about failure and success children as well as through the observation of their interactions in the classroom. We then realized that there were sources for these interpretations or practical ideologies (available theoretical explanations) as well as conditions under which they were able to flourish, namely, those embodied in the politicoeducational system and in their professional and work conditions. Finally, as we described the characteristics of teaching

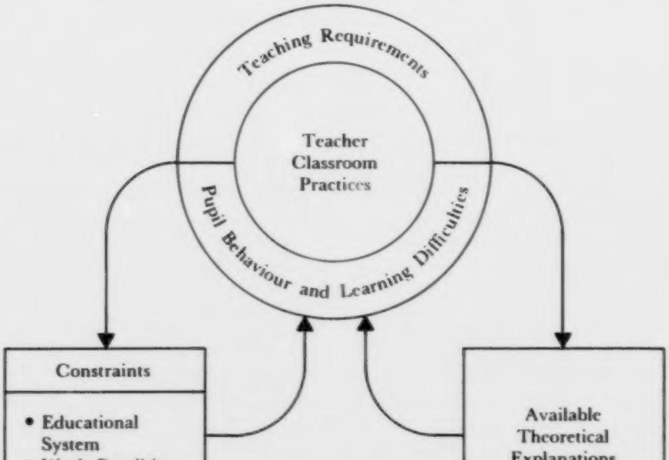
Teaching Requirements
Teacher Classroom Practices
Pupil Behaviour and Learning Difficulties
Constraints
• Educational System
• Work Conditions
• Training
Available Theoretical Explanations

Fig. 2. *Processes affecting the teacher's classroom practices.*

practices themselves, we realized that many of them would not be conducive to learning and would only add to the other conditions that favour a child's failure. Figure 2 attempts to depict the process and its elements as they seemed to emerge from the study of the four country contexts.

The case of Beto

Beto is an example of what we have been trying to say in this study. The beginning of his 1st year in a Chilean primary school showed evidence of his interest in what was going on and his willingness to work. As the days and weeks went by, he seemed to disengage himself more and more from life in his classroom. His teacher interpreted the change as follows:

> At first I thought it was just a behavioural problem. Now I think it is more than that. His father has only come once to see me and his mother will not cooperate, she will not do what I tell her to do. I really am at a loss! I have several psychology books and have been reading about problem children trying to place him somewhere. He probably would do better if he were in a smaller class [there are 38 children in his class]. I think his mother is neurotic because she is so temperamental. She once shouted at me. There should be a guidance counselor in the school with enough time to deal with these problems. Beto is a loner, now nobody plays with him. He hardly speaks, seems always afraid. To me, there is something faulty with him. Tomorrow I will insist that his mother gets Beto's report from the diagnostic clinic.

In considering the above assessment of Beto's situation, the characteristics of his classroom environment have also to be noted. The climate of Beto's class could be described as one of passivity. The pupils there sat and listened or responded to questions. Their instructions were given very precisely, but most of the time they were senseless. All information about the real world was encapsulated in notebooks. It was this class that an observer described as a place where reality was only what the teacher said about it: "In this class, it is as if the world had been bracketed!"

> [The teacher instructs the children about how to draw rain.]
> *Teacher:* I told you not to draw the rain so straight. I have already told you how to draw rain, not so straight!
> *Teacher* [to one of the pupils]: Let me see! Rain should not be so straight, fix it up!

In Beto's class, children read for a short time every day and reading consisted mostly of looking at words copied on the board and then reading them in chorus. By midyear, about half of the children could not read at all. In Beto's class, it was important to write and, for this purpose, copying was a crucial exercise. However, there was no checking of how well children were progressing, except for an assessment called *la prueba de Castellano* (the Spanish test). It was announced several days ahead and care was taken to produce an atmosphere of tension and fear before the event. When the test was finally given, however, the teacher defeated its purpose by helping the children to complete the items because, in the end, her teaching quality would be assessed by the results obtained.

Beto's teacher had been told at the beginning of the year that her class was not a good one; that she had more than the usual quota of children who came from very poor homes and predictably would be low achievers.

She seemed to operate on the assumption that these predictions were accurate. In practice, this meant that greater attention was given to favourites who sat in the front of the class and with whom she interacted more frequently and provided fuller explanations. With the rest, her usual mode was authoritarian and ironic. Beto, she announced to the class, "does nothing, loses his books, his pencils, his erasers." Beto's future as a school boy was not too difficult to foresee; the real question was just how far would he manage to get?

Other evidence

Many of the current studies on school success and failure have looked at its causes either from the perspective of the teacher or the school's effectiveness or from the perspective of the pupil in relation to theories about self-concept and patterns of failure–success attribution. This study focused on the influence of teacher attitudes and behaviour on schooling outcomes of children who come from a low socioeconomic background. Without initially setting out to prove or disprove labeling and attribution of success theories, our observations led us to support the contention that, by and large, children learn from others about what they are or are not capable of doing and that the way in which this concept is internalized (i.e., the meaning each person gives to the outsider's information) substantially affects the success of their learning efforts. A number of children in this study were singled out early in their school days as potential failures for reasons often unrelated to what their performance was like. In the course of 1 year and perhaps of 2 or 3 years, if they were lucky to move that far, their's would be a history of failure. We were not able to investigate the whole course of this process longitudinally (as would be desirable), but we considered that there were sufficient indications pointing to that outcome. If, as Kifer (1977) indicates, it is the history of failure experiences that seriously affects a child, then our observations are of concern.

> Since it is generally agreed that affective traits are not developed suddenly but over a period of time, a single success or a single failure may not have a great impact on the child. There are different kinds of achievement demanded in the classroom — one can be good at some, many, or almost all things — and numerous opportunities to excel. What is more important than a single success or failure is pattern of success or failure. Just as a house is not built in a day, so too affective traits are not. The first time the child sees that the majority of his peers are either better or worse than he is, or that successful accomplishment of a specified task has eluded him, is less important than when the experience is multiplied many times over. It is as the student succeeds or fails continually in reaching standards and expectations set for him that he develops a set of affective views consistent with his record of accomplishment.
>
> (Kifer 1977: 295)

In the context of such a process of erosion of a child's belief in his capabilities, the issue of responsibility for failure is not only laid on the child by teachers and sometimes parents, but it is the child himself who comes to believe that he is solely responsible[5]; such was the case of Boris (in a

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[5] The effect of experiences of success and failure has also been examined by Guthrie (1983), Dillon (1975), and Ames and Ames (1978).

Bolivian school), who told his mother "It's because I'm an ass!" In a survey on failure attribution patterns carried out by Toro and de Rosa (1981) of 280 Colombian primary school children, their teachers, and parents, it was found that almost 80% of parents and children investigated considered that the pupils were primarily responsible for their failure, while most teachers tended to exclude themselves and to divide such responsibility between pupils and parents.

At least one of the underlying causes for failure experiences that appeared in this study is related to determinist beliefs, attitudes, and concomitant behaviour that teachers inherit from their peers; what we have called their "practical ideologies." Not only are failure-labeling processes among teachers affected by their views of the negative effects on schooling experiences produced by poverty, malnutrition, and belonging to an "alien" culture and language group, but also by what we might call their unexamined pedagogical views. In this respect, Wrobel's (1981) ethnography of Brazilian middle and low socioeconomic schools supports the conclusions of our study. Among other aspects, Wrobel looked at the way in which various "theories" get different translations depending on the context in which they are institutionalized. Her contention was that "modern" pedagogical theories such as those usually associated with concepts of individual differences, IQ testing, and participatory or inquiry learning are well received in the private school system where they are openly discussed and negotiated by teachers and parents alike; however, in the State system, which caters to the low socioeconomic groups, these same pedagogies are authoritatively imposed upon teachers, parents, and children, regardless of how their meaning is interpreted.

Thus, it is not unusual to hear head teachers and teachers using words that are part of the modern pedagogic jargon (dialogic, creative thinking, education of the whole person) with meanings that Wrobel characterizes as having a "perverse" dimension. For example, the meaning given to "diagnostic purposes" involves stigmatizing someone as abnormal and the consideration of "psychological dimensions" generally means using information about pupils obtained from face to face contact, parents, other teachers, school marks, and so on, to place children in depreciatory categories. Then, to explain these judgments, teachers resort to factors such as lack of affection at home, parental ignorance, and unsatisfactory socialization processes at home. The following interview from Wrobel's (1981) study could have been lifted from any one of the teacher-interview scripts in our own work:

> I worked in three types of State schools. I worked in Campo Grade, an extremely poor school. I worked with children of all ages and in all grades. It was very tiring, and their level — you know — they had such difficulties on account of their limited IQ precisely because of the kind of socialization they had. They lived in *favelas*, shacks, and you should see the ignorance of their parents, their lack of affection. . .and now I'm in a school here in Gavea. . .but they are impossible. They have been repeating the same class for the last three years. They are 12, 13 years old. I have some who are schizophrenic and others who have IQ limitations. They can't advance any further, they can't become literate.

It is our contention that as teachers become convinced, for reasons unrelated to their teaching behaviour, that some children will not learn, the grounds for examining or reassessing the effectiveness of such behaviour are considerably weakened. This may explain the difficulty in altering the traditional forms of teaching in the countries we have studied by means of the conventional "know-how" information provided in initial or in-service training schemes; these schemes rarely allow teachers to examine critically their practice and the underlying beliefs that prevent them from altering it.

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9

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is part of the essence of a research report such as this that a conclusion be written not only to highlight the findings of the work, but also to suggest future directions. Although, in a sense, both aspects have been dealt with in previous chapters, we will attempt here to sketch a few concluding remarks and recommendations for research and practice. Each of the researchers in the country studies wrote some concluding remarks and these will be presented first.

The Colombian study focused its analysis on the teacher–pupil relationships and, in this respect, on the variety and ambiguity of meanings that are attached to schooling. What the authors found was that schools, in spite of all their shortcomings, constitute a physical and human space where children leave aside the seriousness of their lives working on the land or begging in the streets of Bogotá to become simply children. The Colombian researchers also found that, for parents, schools are locations set aside to learn basic skills useful for life and for the improvement of their lot, hence their manifest fear of innovations, such as the Escuela Nueva program, which they could not see as being relevant to their wants. Other meanings given to schooling were those officially stated as the philosophy of public education in government documents. Teachers, however, had their own meanings, which ranged from seeing education as a means of training children to be clean and orderly to seeing it as a means to literacy, achieved by successfully passing the end of year test. Given these diverse interpretations, the Colombian researchers did not feel they could dutifully extract a precise meaning for success or failure and obtain, in turn, an indication of factors affecting these outcomes. They did not want to force their investigation into a previously defined framework. They felt that what had to be done was to describe and to illuminate classroom life with its inconsistencies and its routines. Their interpretative efforts focused, therefore, not on "explaining" failure, but rather on attempting to discover the rationale behind the observed events, or rather the teaching rationale that produced the arid climate found in most classrooms. How close was this climate to the production of failure? Clearly, one could conclude that, in this atmosphere, some children would never comprehend what they read, use their imagination to write a story, or understand why textbooks have information that is so different from their own experience. Would children have been better off if they had not gone to school? Perhaps not! At least they had learned to play with each other, to be 7 and not 17 years old.

From the point of view of the State, very little of what the school should do in terms of the aims of education actually takes place. Does it really "contribute to a balanced individual and social development based on the right to life and on other human rights?" Does it "promote the development of skills and professional advance in tune with the aptitudes and aspirations of every individual and the needs of society?" Does it "develop the scientific ability to be analytical and critical by means of learning about the principles and methods in each one of the areas of knowledge, so that people may eventually find alternative solutions to national problems?" (See Ministry of Education of Colombia By-Law No. 1419 (1978).) The feeling of the researchers was that those dusty events of the classrooms could hardly lead to the fulfillment of such objectives. Thus, the only meaningful conclusion is for the readers, teachers, parents, politicians, and pupils to come together to reflect in some "public sphere," paraphrasing Habermas, about how these classrooms affect children and how they embody the various meanings that all those concerned attribute to education and schooling.

The Chilean study was concerned with one aspect of school life in particular, i.e., the process whereby a child loses his or her sense of worth and will to succeed. The research group followed the experiences of children in their classrooms for a full school year and, without much effort, they were able to detect how the process was initiated, what teaching experiences reinforced it, and what contribution the teacher-parent relationships made to the process. What was more difficult to say and, in a sense, was left in the air, was how much of the past life and training of the teacher, the restrictions of bureaucratic arrangements, the political atmosphere, and the struggle to live affected both their interpretative frameworks and their actions. In Chile, the future should involve bringing together these two worlds of reflected interpretations and actions to improve the chances of children in these schools.

The Venezuelans carried out their study as members of a Ministry of Education research team. They had to temper their conclusions; neither teachers nor administrators would feel at ease if a qualitative assessment of their work were to be highlighted in a report of this nature. So, as they presented their findings, they focused on the range of practices and events that naturally appear when a number of classrooms is observed. They reported on the continuum between authoritarian and participatory styles of teaching, from what might be called creative, active philosophies of teaching to forms that denote pure mechanical relationships. However, they endeavoured to illustrate who the teachers were that they observed, how they were trained, their life experiences, and their views on social issues and other things that would affect classroom activities. They showed us one particular school that they felt provided a model of a community school. What was the most effective type of teaching? Again, it was left to the teachers and the public, who would read their report, to draw their own conclusions.

The children of the Bolivian study belonged to many worlds. They were city dwellers and slum dwellers. They spoke one language at school and another at home. They played during breaks and then went home to cook, to mount, as vendors, a bus, or to help their mother in the market. Teachers would not have an easy time teaching these children. Their solution to the problem of dealing with the complicated background of their pupils was to impose monotony: endless repetition and arbitrary punishment. The children were blamed for being stupid and blamed if they tried nonconventional ways of coping with their difficulties. "At school my son is sad" was one mother's assessment that the Bolivian researchers used as the initial statement for their conclusions. The Bolivian study, however, is a hopeful one, for it discovered what a teacher who is slightly different can do, thus suggesting where the possibilities for change may lie. The conclusion of the Bolivian study was to indicate the need of working with teachers stimulating, through narratives about their work, the awareness of their practice.

All in all, what did we gain through the study? It would seem that the curtain that has enclosed the primary school classrooms in Latin America has been opened a bit more. Sixteen schools in four different countries of Latin America were studied. The classes observed were all in the lower primary level from 1st to 5th year (57 altogether) — one could almost say, an appreciable sample. Although the timing, intensity, and length of the observation was different for each country, within each country and between the schools, the purpose was always the same. We attempted to describe classroom events, to focus on situations judged to be significant for the understanding of classroom conditions leading to success or failure, and to get at meanings about education, schooling, success, and failure held by various actors in the educational process (parents, teachers, pupils, and, in some cases, community members). The results were strikingly similar, making the generalization in terms of descriptive categories presented in Chapter 8 quite feasible. It was also feasible to attempt some explanation for the phenomenon of school failure on the basis of what emerged from the ethnographies and to link it to existing theoretical approaches to the problem such as labeling and attribution of success theories as well as to theories related to teachers' thinking.

We focused on teachers and their interpretation of the teaching situation and of the learning needs of their children. We became aware of the possible effect on their thinking of various theoretical approaches to which they could have been subjected (the "socioeconomic determinants of achievement" and the "pedagogical traditionalism" syndromes) and that appeared to colour their interpretation of the "problem-child" condition. Generally speaking, we were concerned at how reticent they were to consider inadequacies in their own teaching style as possibly accounting for pupil learning difficulties. Thus, we felt that there was some justification in referring to the teachers' explanations about the nature of pupil problems as being inaccurate assessments. We attributed these "practical ideologies" to distorted beliefs about the source of pupil problems and about the quality of their own classroom teaching and other related interactions (e.g., with parents).

The strength of these conclusions, it seemed to us, rested on the fact that in every context there was at least one teacher who was different because she could not be placed comfortably within any of the descriptive categories that seemed to fit the other teachers. Senora Rosa was the example we selected for this book, but there were others. In appearance, senora Rosa's teaching style was similar to that found in other classrooms, although the physical conditions in which she taught were less adequate and poorer than in other countries. She used the recitation method and worked with similar materials to those used by most teachers; however, as seen in Chapter 6, there were differences in her classes: during her lessons, children were really invited to take part and to contribute their questions, comments, and experiences

Children of the poor must be competently equipped with the skills and knowledge that are easily accessible to more privileged groups in society.

to the lesson, and their contribution was accepted. Senora Rosa made an effort to make lesson contents meaningful by exploring the children's background of understandings and personal experience. Like many of the other teachers, she appeared kind and caring, but she was also firm and provided direction to the teaching interactions. Senora Rosa did not believe, as she told us and as we observed her, that children could be divided into "salvageable" and "nonsalvageable" pupils. The pupils would all require her efforts to learn at least basic literacy skills, although some were slower than others. She did not have a higher regard, as she explained, for pupils who receive prizes because they generally have a good starting point in terms of intelligence and memory, and she did not consider the child who does not receive prizes to be necessarily less intelligent; maybe this child cannot profit from the system of rote repetitiveness or maybe "we do not understand the way in which he understands things." Senora Rosa's interpretations of difficult children included the awareness that poverty creates limiting conditions; however, she did not see these conditions as determinant. She was convinced that failure could be averted if children were respected and their learning needs and personality traits were considered. Her respect for pupils extended also to their parents, both in their role as parents as well as in their quality as human beings. In this respect, her attitudes differed greatly from those of many of the teachers found in this study. These beliefs of senora Rosa could be discernible in the way she taught and in happy interactions with pupils and parents. Her pupils not only were all successful that year, but were also seen to continue into the next year, with a new teacher, with the same positive patterns of behaviour and contribution to classroom activities they had exhibited under senora Rosa.

In assessing the effectiveness of senora Rosa and comparing her with other teachers, there appears to be no reason to single her out as having a privileged background. Like other teachers in Bolivia, she worked in the same school system with the same lack of resources and the same regulations. Her school was poor and so were the children, who were mostly of Aymara extraction. However, she had interpreted her early years of teaching experience as happy and useful. She was also aware that she worked under a school head teacher who was exceptionally committed to his work and caring of the school, its children, and the teachers; perhaps in this she had been more fortunate than others. There were other factors that might also be seen as different and that perhaps were related to the quality of her teaching. Not only was she interested in the parents of her pupils, but she also gave her time voluntarily, together with other teachers in the school, to teach the parents literacy skills or to help them understand the culture and requirements of the school. As for herself, she clearly believed in the need to improve her knowledge base and to enrol in in-service courses. Many of the teachers in the other countries studied made great sacrifices to take courses or to attend a university degree program; but, in most cases, they expressly declared that this was to increase the possibility of promotion.

The case of senora Rosa serves to delineate what might be the outline of a conclusion and of possible recommendations for policymakers, for teachers, and for teaching in poor environments.

- The teachers in this study, by virtue of willingly assuming a position of enormous power and control over the classroom events, were also very much responsible for its outcomes (e.g., the success or failure of their pupils).
- Teacher perception of such responsibility, however, was generally weak. They held to preconceived views about the effects of deprivation (social or psychological) upon the children they had to teach, attributing to this deprivation the main responsibility for failure. The illiterate or uncooperative parent was also included in the attribution of responsibility for failure.

- The drabness of many of the teaching contexts and the difficulties produced by the "official" pejorative treatment awarded to teachers led many to despair of actions to counteract these conditions and, thus, to feel justified in neglecting the quality of their teaching.
- As a result of the general characteristics of the teaching observed, it could be said that the teaching models offered to most newcomers to these contexts were dismal to say the least. Thus, the possibilities of change being produced by "new blood" into the schools were dim indeed.

In synthesis, the problem of school failure appeared to us to be not simply a consequence of pupils' actions, although this interpretation could not be discarded (and although the pupils thought it was), but, in the cases studied, the explanations for failure could be traced to the teachers and the schooling conditions. Failure is a concept that, to our informants, meant many things. Such meanings ranged from not learning the basic skills required to operate in society to learning these skills in mechanical forms. Failure is a concept that, to children, meant feeling sad, unworthy, and without a zest for life; for their Bolivian parents, failure meant the futility of trying to penetrate a culture that they would never be able to feel was their own. School failure, it seemed to us, is partly the result of circumstances, but, to a large extent, is actively produced within the schools. Perhaps that is why an Andean myth talks about the schools that frightened away the sons of the Inca (Rescaniere 1973).

What then can be done about failure in schools and classes such as those we described? Our recommendations centre mostly on the teachers and on the considerations that policymakers need to make in their respect; they also consider the role of future research in furnishing materials for teacher-training programs all over the Latin American region.

- We need to know more about these teachers (in the lower school levels of poor environments), about both the "majority" and the "senora Rosa" teachers, about their way of thinking, their practical philosophies or ideologies (as may be the case), and how these are formed.
- We need to gather from the practice of "senora Rosa" teachers samples of their materials, excerpts from their interactions, and information about their techniques to illustrate texts for teacher-training activities.
- We need to explore what goes on in teacher-training institutions: what knowledge, what methods, and what interpretations about schooling and education are conveyed in their lecture halls and corridors.
- We need to organize in-service workshops where curriculum materials and teaching styles are explored. This implies the use of materials that illustrate these styles and serve as stimulation for activities of reflection by teachers about their practice. Teachers should be confronted with contrasting types of teaching and knowledge about the effects of such styles as exemplified in real cases.
- We need to provide the opportunity for teachers, in workshops, to explore their meanings and their "practical ideologies," and to relate this to an examination of their practice and to their perceptions of the constraints that operate in society and the educational system.

- We need to ensure that teachers have access to reliable and practical information about what is available to improve their teaching, not by way of another set of prescriptions, but by way of alternative propositions about how and what to teach, so that children are competently equipped with the skills and knowledge that are easily accessible to more privileged groups in society.

Although it may be said that this study has not produced any information that was not already part of the stereotyped version of what goes on in low socioeconomic corners of the Third World, we would argue that it is much more than that. We have known the names of the children affected and we have encountered the teachers and their philosophies of teaching described in words seldom found in the usual questionnaire or attitude scale that seek to explore these philosophies. We have discovered the way in which particular nets of relationships are webbed together: how parents interact with teachers, teachers with pupils, and pupils with each other. We have learned, in some cases, how vendors in the street see the school and what the effect is on teacher morale of senseless requirements by the authorities. We would like teachers who operate in contexts similar to those examined, both in the Third and the First worlds, to read this account, not with anger about what is disclosed, but with an attitude of suspended judgment; we would like them to examine the world of their everyday experience about which they may not have reflected and to do so in light of the limiting sociopolitical structures outside it; we would like them to assess where the limits of their responsibility for the learning outcomes of the children of the poor really lie. Perhaps, these limits could be extended a bit so that such children may have a chance in a world that is mostly being built against them.

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Appendix 1. On Doing Ethnography

Araceli de Tezanos

A critical stage is reached in ethnographic research when it becomes clear that sense will have to be made of the mountain of information collected during fieldwork. Even before that, however, as the first disorganized notes are rewritten in an extended and intelligible form, the awareness arises that some kind of interpretation will have to come into play and that we will have to face up to our role as interpretative researchers.

This appendix refers to the way in which the Colombian team came to understand what it means to carry out ethnographic research as well as the nature of the interpretation process itself. To achieve an awareness of what was involved in ethnographic research, we found it necessary to appeal to philosophy and, particularly, to the consideration of issues dealing with knowledge and the mode of getting to it. In light of this study and of our experiences in the field, we discussed problems related to observer-researcher assumptions about knowledge and how these might affect interpretation. We considered the nature of the observation process and the modes of dealing, at the interpretative stage, with knowledge that we would have to present to others. We finally decided that our purpose was to achieve a reconstruction of the situations that we were studying, i.e., the teaching process in four primary schools in Colombia.

Observation

From the time we began our research, we qualified an initial, somewhat vague notion of what we would be observing by focusing on school relationships as well as school-community links. We further proposed to observe those relationships from a wide perspective and without unnecessary presuppositions.

Perhaps, we need to make clear what we mean by unnecessary presuppositions. Obviously, from the beginning of our research, we knew that we were operating on the basis of some assumptions; but our concern was to avoid a sort of straitjacket that would place our understanding of reality within a theoretical framework that already contained an explanation of such reality. We felt that those presuppositions that are a necessary part of any research activity should not, in this case, be derived from existing theoretical models but rather from our own status as social beings, from our own consciousness about this status, and from the historical and cultural conditions that surrounded the phenomena we were investigating.

Thus, we were led to centre our investigative procedures around the research object itself, i.e., around the observation of situations found in the daily life of the school and of its related community. We took the very broad questions that were part of the initial rationale of this study to be simply guiding questions. We wanted to avoid preempting too early the deeper interpretation of the materials we would be collecting.

We thus began, on the one hand, to reflect about the conditions and aims of the observation process and, on the other hand, to determine what was relevant or irrelevant in what had to be observed. We knew that, in an ethnographic perspective, this could not be resolved in an a priori manner (cf. CIEA-IPN 1980; Rockwell 1980). In sum, we considered that it was not possible to really understand an object under investigation if one was to start from a theoretical interpretation of it; likewise, we could not convert the observation process into a simplified search for what is considered to be significant beforehand.

From the point of view of research that is qualitative in nature, we considered the observation process to be one that documents the whole phenomenon. We felt, therefore, that we had to look at everything, even though we knew that it would be impossible to perceive totality in a single glance. We were also aware that the researcher who begins work with the purpose of looking at everything finds that his or her initial relationship to the object will be an "abstract" one, i.e., one that is poor and superficial. This is because the first encounter with the object of research is marked by common sense and only includes its external traits.[1]

Nevertheless, to avoid being guided by unanalyzed selection criteria, we decided that we must observe as much as possible within our area of concern.

> The normal process of observation is a selective one; one always selects unconsciously in terms of some previous categorization — whether social or theoretical — about the reality that is being observed. Where does one look to consider the schools? What is a school? The normal tendency is to discard all that is considered to be irrelevant; that is why it is important, although impossible, to observe everything. Ethnographic observation does not proceed from a moment in which everything is "seen" to one in which some elements are selected and defined in order to be observed, but exactly in the opposite way. Initially, little is observed due to the unconcious selection process which takes place, and there is need therefore to train oneself to see more. This is achieved through opening up to details that still cannot be seen as part of any interpretative scheme and by picking up the signals that appear within the context and which point to new meaningful elements and relationships.
>
> (Rockwell 1980)

As noted in this quotation, the establishment of categories, which is the starting point for interpretation, is already a fact within the process of observation; i.e., in *observing, something* is selected from the observed object as the element the observer finds on the surface of that object, and becomes a subject for definition. This process of selection in no way refers back to any theory or model but rather to the type and degree of relationships that the researcher has with reality. Throughout the process of observing ethnographically and going from the abstract to the concrete, one is always engaged in the selection of contents without previously defined criteria, thus signaling the importance of the observer's viewpoint. In this respect then, we concluded that the researchers would be better equipped to fulfil their research purposes once they became consciously aware of their own selective processes; this would allow them to observe first what is immediate and superficial to later proceed to what might be more substantially and concretely the object of investigation.

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[1] The concepts of "abstract" and "concrete" are given diverse meanings in philosophical literature. Here, we are concerned only with one of those meanings: unilateral and multilateral. In analyzing the ascent from the abstract to the concrete, we consider as abstract that which is unilateral, incomplete, or "poor"; as concrete, that which is multilateral, complete, or "rich." Abstractness appears as one aspect of a totality; it is the unity of diversity. Hence, these concepts are categories that are able to cover universally all of nature, society, and thought (cf. Alexzeiev 1964).

The various steps that lead toward understanding a research object and toward its concreteness are steps taken toward the essence of that object. The awareness of the details in the object lead, in turn, toward awareness of the object's essential characteristics. Details are usually considered to be accidental conditions of an object and are not seen in connection to understanding it as a whole. Yet, to know an object is not enough; it must be acknowledged; i.e., it must be seen and understood in different ways. To this end, although details may be considered to be nonpertinent or even troublesome, they are important. In illuminating contradictions within the process of interpretation, these particular significant elements allow us to see the essence of the object and how it operates within reality.

Analysis of Fieldwork

Once the fieldwork was completed, the formal need for interpretation became more stringent; this involved the need to understand the reality we had experienced both from within the observed situation and without losing sight of ourselves as researchers and of the purposes of our work. We did have general purposes that were embedded in the initial research questions, but they would eventually be reformulated as we moved on to deeper consideration of the object under study.

There are two steps involved in the analysis of field material: description and interpretation.

Description

Geertz (1973) speaks of ethnography as being the possibility of carrying out an in-depth description ("thick") of particular situations within reality. His view is analogous to the dictionary definition of "description": "the action of setting forth in words by mentioning characteristics" or "verbal representation or portraiture." In using these definitions, we found that the issue of the "language" of descriptions would be important.

To resolve the question of language, we had to consider that the "results" of an ethnographic investigation should not only be presented to the "scientific community," but also to the participants in the social events that had been studied. Thus, it seemed to us that, in some way, the ethnographer is a translator who operates in two directions: he or she must translate the language of the participants in the social events into the linguistic code of the scientific community; also, the ethnographer must present his or her description to the original participants for their consideration.

The analysis of description not only relates to its syntactic structure, but also to its intention of conveying all or a part of reality to the reader. To understand this translation function of the descriptive process, a distinction must be made between what is understood and how it is understood.[2] In translating a literary piece, the translator rewrites it. Similarly, when the ethnographer describes that part of reality he or she has observed, it is also rewritten. However, the translator's and the ethnographer's modes of rewriting are different. The translator finds an already established order within the text being translated, while the ethnographer has to deal with a somewhat chaotic reality to which he or she must give sense. Yet, both the translator and the ethnographer must move constantly between what is understood and the way in which it is understood. Although words in different languages may have identical meanings, the way in which they are understood may be quite different. This, of course, will be related to the way in which cultural structures differ from each other or are dependent on their historical development. Here, then, is where the roles of the translator and the ethnographer converge, as both must evoke in the new language an echo of the original language.

Benjamin's (1970) concept of translation, which he contrasts with literary creation, states that in translating, one does not alter the depth of what might be called the idiomatic forest, rather, one looks at it from the outside or, better, from the front. By doing so, the translator, without entering this forest, produces in the new language an echo of the work written in the foreign language.

When, as ethnographers, we attempt to construct the description of the reality we have observed, we find ourselves faced with a myriad of somewhat chaotic facts we cannot describe in depth without falling prey to disjointed factual assertions. Therefore, we must look at reality "from without" and "from the front"; i.e., we must establish ourselves at a distance to "echo" the original. Thus, as ethnographers in this study, we began by sketching some representative facts of all or part of the reality we observed to produce a good description of the school procedures we were concerned with, but without yet referring to their essential predicates.

In performing this descriptive sketch, we began by respecting the order of elements or hierarchical judgments about the classroom that were held by the original participants: the teachers and the pupils. Such an order or hierarchical positioning of elements was not always articulated by them, but we were able to discover it as a recurring component of their actions (see Chapter 5). Without this discovery, we would not have been able to move easily from merely organizing the facts observed into creating some form of a priori categories. In other words, we needed to move away both from our own theories as well as from the classroom's concreteness to abstract the participants' mode of seeing and judging it, as this became manifest through their actions. Thus, we began to "see" and "read" the reality of the classroom.

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[2] Much of the following discussion on the sociological function of "translation" owes to the thought of the Frankfurt School sociologist Walter Benjamin (1970).

To discover, as we did, that a teacher may teach through a series of repetitive steps and that these steps could be related to what is found in pedagogical textbooks on how lectures should be delivered does not tell us much about the essence of teaching. The only way to better understand the original teaching process would be to find it reflected in the teacher's training.

The original teaching process was made up, in this case, of all the events that took place within a classroom that involved a teacher and a group of pupils. These components emerged as critical parts of the educational process. We put them together as we endeavoured to read the classroom as a text to be translated; in providing this structure to the text we were rewriting, we were able to see how, as ethnographers, we differed from the simple translator. While the literary text that the translator works with has a unity within itself, the reality we were describing as ethnographers had to be constructed from particular, separated, disorganized events into a comprehensible whole. This meant referring back to the participants in their own words and actions and attempting to understand the hierarchical nature of the situations we observed without subjecting it to theoretical interpretations.

Interpretation

Having constructed our description, we had the option of remaining content with what had been achieved or of going back to look at the phenomenon we had experienced in our fieldwork. If carried out, this second procedure would require another, different reentry into reality. The original description had already been one entry into the reality of the school, the teachers, and the pupils. Now we would have to enter again, this time to search for essential structures of meaning. In deciding to do this, we had commenced the arduous task of interpretation that would enable us to undertake a theoretical reconstruction of reality.

To interpret is to search for relationships, i.e., to discover the structure within a particular situation by allowing its essence to appear from the phenomena. We were leaving the language of "it seems" to enter into the language of "it is." It would no longer "seem to be" but would "be" although "being" would always need to be seen as determined by concrete historical conditions. The actual "being" of the Colombian educational institutions, which was the object of our heuristic processes of interpretation, could not be seen only as the observed behaviours of teachers, children, and administrators, or only as aims contained within official documents. Through a hermeneutical effort carried out by us as ethnographers, it would have to emerge from the observed contradictions between an ascribed theoretical rationality and the rationality of the real object.

The hermeneutical process began with the possibility of taking apart the texts that had been constructed in the descriptive phase. We felt the need to remove ourselves, so to speak, and then to submerge ourselves again in the object we had described as an "echo of the original" and to engage at a distance in a skeptical reading of that description. Guided by this skepticism, we looked within the text for recurring events and then for a connecting thread within them that might allow us to ascribe meaning to the classroom and so to reconstruct its "image."[3]

The recurring events that we found were taken to be signs or coded language that needed interpretation and so we sought to isolate and define their elements by means of critical concepts. However, we did not seek concepts borrowed from other theories as might be the case when a philosopher such as Theodor Adorno makes use of Marxist or Freudian categories to deal with music or philosophy texts. Rather, we looked for concepts that we could see as emerging within the text. We hoped that, in this way, these concepts would not be only analogies of the object we were studying but its real manifestation. In our work, we refer to them as "significant moments" and to their signs as "key incidents."

The reordering of these signs and of their mediating concepts thus generated a representation of the reality we were studying. What we tried to construct was an image that, through a process of "disenchantment" or of skepticism about the initially described object, made visible the essential nature of its social relationships. Such disenchantment had only been possible when the particular was dialectically related to the whole through means of conceptual reflection. It did not emerge from our immediate experience but resulted from our attempt to construct through interpretation an image of our object. Thus, interpretation, as we saw it, did not consist of giving reality to a determinate meaning (putting into it a meaning), but rather searching for its meaning within its historical actuality and trying to discover those forms of social relationships that were hidden in the appearances of the research object we were considering.

Theoretical Construction

We believe that the ultimate purpose of research is the construction of knowledge to feed into the development of theory. When research is of an educational type, however, one is faced with a sort of Cartesian doubt: Is there an educational theory?; If there is no such theory, then what is the purpose of educational research?; What do its results feed into? The last part of this chapter touches on these issues as we have come to see them from our work in the field.

We shall start with the very simple proposition that education does have meaning as a social practice. Its activities have led throughout history to a wide set of reflections about its aims, about its various forms of action, about its content, and about the relations among its participants. It is our belief that such reflections have contributed to the building of a theoretical structure for education, mostly because, as in any other discipline, these reflections have resulted from the experience of their authors.

Being the result of human endeavour and political engagement in history, reflections on education are inspired by differing viewpoints. We are thus able to talk about the idealism of positivist or Marxist conceptions of education, or about psychological, economical, or sociological approaches to the study of education. In the same way, we are able to say that educational research has the potential of contributing to a constant renewal of such theories.

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[3] The concept of "image" is understood, following Adorno (1975), as objectified representations, "which are not simply given but have to be produced by human beings."

Any educational idea has implicit within itself a theoretical rationale; such is also the case with educational practices as found in educational settings. The issue, then, is to discover what degree of coherence exists between the rationale of educational theory and the rationale found in educational practices. Research has a role to play in this respect, although not one of accommodating the practical to the theoretical rationale or vice versa. The ultimate aim of research is not to resolve contradictions but to illuminate them (Adorno 1975). From an ethnographic perspective, it seems quite clear that the product of our interpretative processes about reality is not to offer results in the traditional sense of the word; i.e., results that can be inserted as Meccano pieces within some theoretical framework about schools and teachers. Rather, our purpose is to progress in the construction of a theory about the school and what goes on within it as well as the school's relation to a social whole. Thus, those "real situations" that are the starting point of science are not simply seen as data to be verified and used for prediction in accordance with the laws of probability. Every datum depends not only on nature but also on humanity's power over nature. The objects, the type of perceptions, the questions that are asked, and the meaning of the answers all illuminate human activity and the degree of human power (see Horkheimer 1972).

Within this kind of inquiry, therefore, the process of theoretical reconstruction must not only be the result of the investigator's reflection but also the result of a more collective work of reflection. This is because reflection is a lived experience, a dialectical social practice that leads the participants in the educative process to increased awareness about education as an expression of the social totality within which it occurs and develops. Seen from this point of view, the ethnographic perspective within a qualitative investigation of the reality of the school could allow not only for its interpretations but also for its transformation.

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Appendix 2. Research Framework and Training Program

Research Framework

When the idea of carrying out an ethnographic study in Latin America was discussed at the Bogotá meeting (May 1981), a research framework was also considered and approved in principle. Later on, each of the country teams introduced some changes depending on their particular circumstances and views on the project. On the whole, however, the main questions remained as guidelines for what was to be attempted everywhere. The proposal focuses on Latin America as a suitable region for carrying the suggestion of a study on teachers and classrooms.

Latin America is a region with great inequalities of a social and economic nature, which are reflected in the educational attainment of the population. There are such abiding problems as a high percentage of repetition in the first years of the primary school and serious rural-urban imbalances in educational provisions and results. After a decade of optimism, where it was hoped that universal primary education would be achieved and that secondary education would produce the labour force needed for economic development, the gains, although impressive in some cases, were not what was expected. Deep socioeconomic factors account for these poor results and a substantial amount of research in Latin America has uncovered these underlying factors. Real improvement, therefore, requires radical structural changes of the political and economic system of most of these countries. Unfortunately, the experience of the last decade indicates that, in many places, substantial change will come very slowly, if at all, and that, in the meantime, institutions such as schools may reinforce existing inequalities. Thus, either one is enclosed in the vicious circle that keeps things as they are or one tries to break the circle at some point where changes seem possible. Education is an area where there still is lip service to the notion of minimal levels of attainment and equal opportunities for achieving these levels. If school results are viewed as being influenced both by socieconomic and school factors, it is possible to suggest that changes in the schooling process that take into account the social determinants might produce results that lessen the negative effects of poverty and increase changes of achieving such minimal levels of education. Therefore, it is important to discover what these changes might be.

Within the schooling process, it is possible to focus on the teacher-pupil interaction as a microcosm that reflects the variety of school and social influences. It is possible to look at different settings and attend to what happens in classrooms. How do teachers, through their words, actions, and gestures, affect pupil outcomes and how do they react to pupil characteristics? The level of teacher qualifications in Latin America has risen in the last 15 years or so; many countries have introduced modern curricula, teaching aids, in-service training programs, and carried out other administrative changes that presumably will affect teacher performance. Is this so, how do these changes become manifest in the classroom? There are few studies that have carried out prolonged in-depth observation of what happens in schools. There still exist important unanswered questions. What happens in classrooms that affects the high rate of 1st-grade repetition? Do teachers do anything more than perform in a classroom in spite of having been depicted in so many policy documents as "agents for community development"? Why is it that slow learners, repeaters, and drop outs often encounter opposition on the part of their teachers?

If what happens in schools of poor rural and urban communities of Latin America was examined, it might be possible to suggest a number of teacher- or school-related factors that either increase or diminish the chances of success of those children who are born on the edge of the social system. Although context specific, such a study might also contribute hypothetical explanations of what happens in similar locations elsewhere.

It might be worthwhile, therefore, to examine the teaching situation of Latin American schools, in the light of State objectives for their educational systems and the cultural needs of their communities, to see what role the teacher plays and what conditions in his or her performance and interaction with children and environment produce better or worse results. The target population would be the poor, i.e., those least benefited at present by exposure to schooling.

Research proposal

On the basis of these considerations, it is proposed to carry out a comprehensive research scheme on the effects of teachers upon student learning in the first years of Latin American primary schools. The study will involve several stages, each of which will be self-contained but dependent on the previous stage. The scheme will aim at the production of policy recommendations able to affect decisions regarding teacher training and administrative arrangements of the system. The following stages are considered.

- An exploratory study designed to examine the teaching process and the factors that affect a teacher's influence on student learning (only one reported in the book);
- The design of a research model to be carried out in several Latin American countries to test the conclusions of the first study; and
- The design of experiments in teacher training to induce changes related to the findings in the first two stages.

The proposed research scheme considers education to be a part of and dependent on characteristics of the socioeconomic context and assumes that to understand what happens in schools and how the schooling process affects children, the interaction pattern in Fig. 5 should be considered.

Thus, to examine why children do not learn how to read or write, attention should be directed not only to teacher behaviour, but also to the way in which this behaviour is affected by the educational system, the social system, parents' values and expectations, school conditions, and the child's characteristics. Much research has been done that surveys some of these relationships, particularly the relationship between socioeconomic factors and learning. Not much research looks at the educational process and its concrete operation in schools and their communities.

First phase of the study

The purpose of the study at this stage is to examine the teaching situation in a few primary schools in Latin America to discover how and why teachers contribute to the failure or success of their students as judged by the educational system's requirements.

More specifically, this research seeks to answer questions on the following topics.

- *The teacher in the classroom:* What are the events in the teaching process and classroom activities that appear to affect pupil learning?
- *The educational system:* What are the characteristics of the system, teacher qualifications, in-service training provisions, teacher–pupil ratios, modernization attempts, availability of resources and teaching aids, educational policies and the relationship to national policies, systems of administration, etc.? How do these factors relate to school events and teaching processes?
- *The community:* What are the characteristics of the community surrounding the school or from where the child comes? What are its activities and level of development? What are the actual beliefs and values of parents, religious, and community leaders regarding education? What language is predominantly spoken? What is the relationship between community values and beliefs about education and theories of modernization as sustained by policymakers and teachers? How do all these factors affect the teaching process?
- *Patterns of social relationships:* Who are the teachers and how do they relate to other members of the community? What are the roles and expectations that community members have regarding teachers and administrators and, vice versa, of teachers regarding the role of parents and other community members? How do these relations affect the structure of the school and its activities: the style of teaching and learning?

It is proposed that the study be carried out using a "qualitative" methodology. The emphasis will be on understanding the school situation, the processes going on within its confines, its relation to the outside community, and the perceptions of all those related to the educational process from within and without. In this perspective, the methods of ethnographic observation will be used. Researchers will live the life of the school and its community for a time, taking extensive field notes that describe the main events. The interpretation of the field notes will require information from various sources: interviews with teachers, parents, leading community members, and others as deemed necessary. There will also be a good deal of information that will have to come from school records, educational authorities, official documents, newsletters to teachers, and journals. Finally, the social and political structure must be noted and all relevant information about it will have to be used.

The focus of the study is the reasons for success or failure. Various sources of information will be used to discover the position children occupy in the success-failure scales of their classrooms. In the final analysis, however, success or failure will have to be determined in the way schools or educational systems define the conditions for promotion to a higher grade.

Training Program

The training program included 4 weeks in Texas at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education in Austin and the Intercultural Development Research Associates in San Antonio. The Texas training, organized by Dr Susan Heck, emphasized both anthropological theory and practice, the latter primarily in on-going research in bilingual (Hispanic) classrooms. The training consisted of four basic components: philosophy of the anthropological perspective, ethnographic techniques, affiliation with on-going ethnographic projects, and management and design issues in ethnography. In Austin, the participants also stayed with Hispanic families, became involved in activities of the University's Latin American Studies Center, and were exposed to several bilingual education programs.

In Mexico, the training was conducted during 3 weeks at the Departamento de Investigaciones Educativas (DIE) at the Center for Research and Advanced Studies of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional. The coordinator was DIE's resident anthropologist, Elsie Rockwell. The Mexican training focused on both research techniques and theories related to schooling in the Latin American social and economic context.

In addition to the trainees and Mrs Rockwell, the 3-day conclusion of the training program in Mexico was attended by Drs Heck and Beatrice Avalos, the consulting coordinator to this project. Its purpose was to review the training program and plan in greater detail the design and schedule of each national study.

The training program was, in general, a success, in that it systematically transmitted information on ethnographic research to individuals interested in but inadequately prepared for such research. It apparently was able not only to place ethnography in the wider context of social science and phenomenology, but also to provide extensive experience in classroom observation, note taking, interviewing, and qualitative data analysis. Important literature in the field was also provided to the participants, often as a Spanish translation.

CANADA